

THE INDIGENOUS TRADE SYSTEM OF SOUTHEAST
ESTADO BOLIVAR, VENEZUELA

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I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to describe the operation of an indigenous trade system found in the southeast corner of Estado Bolivar, Venezuela, among the Pemon and their neighbors. Pemon are a Carib-speaking ethnic group numbering some four thousand individuals within the boundaries of Venezuela. Basic data for this essay were gathered in a field stay of thirteen months among the Pemon and other Carib-speaking dialect groups in 1970-71 by the author.¹

The trade system will be described against the background of Pemon social relations and Pemon social structure. It is necessary to distinguish sharply between these two. Social relations can only be described. That is, they are the ethnographer's perceptions and his approximation of actual behavior. Social structure, on the other hand, represents a kind of second-order abstraction, since it is the ethnographer's elucidation of the principles ordering social relations, constructed out of his own and the natives' models. Major focus in this exposition is a narrative account of the sociology of indigenous exchange among the Pemon. A sketch of Pemon social relations precedes the account of the trade system. It should be made clear at this point that the view of Pemon social relations as broken up into a number of articulated, functionally interrelated subsystems is an analytic construct against which the descriptive portion of this essay must be set. Pemon do not break up social reality in this fashion. The major subsystems which will

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be discussed in detail below are: trade system, *capitán* system, kinship system. The kinship system is primary and the other two systems are superimposed on it.

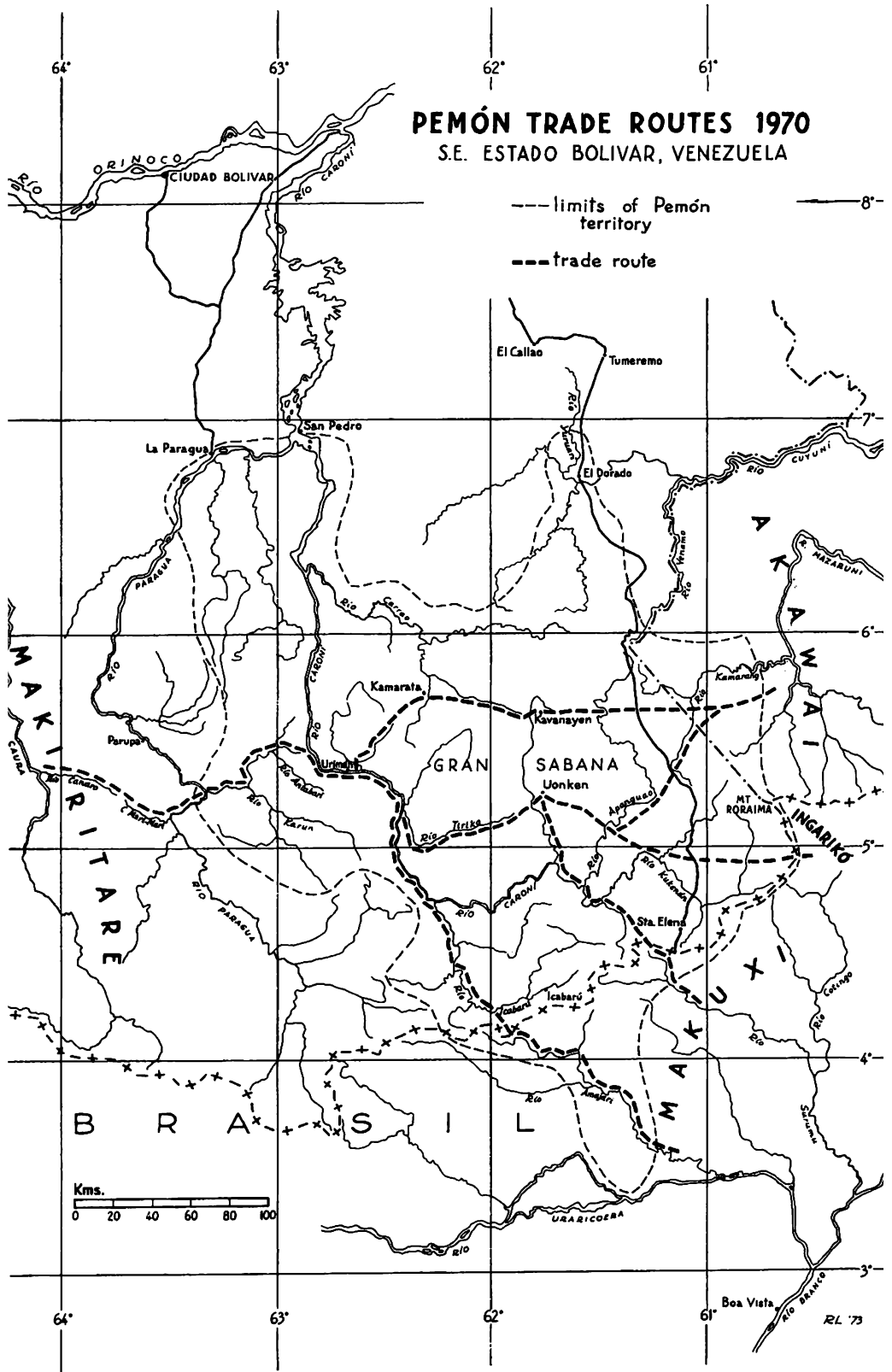
In order to understand the trade system as it is presently constituted, a sketch of Pemon social organization is required. The basic operational unit in Pemon society is the household, and there are no groups qua group which are superordinate to this unit. Pemon households are scattered over the Gran Sabana and neighboring regions of Venezuela, Guayana, and Brazil in an area bounded by lat. $3^{\circ} 20'$ — 7° , long. $60^{\circ} 30'$ — $63^{\circ} 40'$ (cf. map). Most Pemon live near the gallery forests along the rivers and streams that flow through the Sabana, but the adaptation of the Pemon extends into the lowland tropical forest (*bosque húmedo tropical* in Holdridge's classification, cf. EWEL & MADRIZ, 1968:87 ff.) in the western portion of the region, and to the subtropical slopes of the Mt. Roraima formation in the east. Cultivation takes place in the gallery forests, but the Pemon are preferentially savanna dwellers. The westward extension of the Pemon reaches the lower R. Paragua in the west. In that area, where Pemon are in constant contact with criollo culture, their adaptation is to the lowland forest. Bitter manioc (*Manihot utilisima*), the Pemon staple, grows equally well in each of the two ecological zones inhabited by the Pemon, and does well even in the extremely sandy soils bounding the middle reaches of the R. Caroní (above San Pedro de Las Bocas and below Otovanta falls).

I stress the flexibility of Pemon adaptation in order to rule out the strictly ecological explanations for the extreme dispersion which characterizes the Pemon settlement pattern. Even in the eastern reaches of the Gran Sabana, where cultivation is limited to small gallery forests, there is sufficient space available for much more extensive cultivation than is current among the Pemon. The only concentrations of population found among the Pemon today are all due to the influences of proselytizing religious groups (Capuchin missions and Seventh Day Adventist settlements), and have been maintained by the strong economic and ideological pull of external institutions. The normal Pemon settlement pattern is quite dispersed, along minor watercourses, and allows for a settlement ranging from one nuclear family to several nuclear or joint (married man and sons or sons-in-law with their wives) families.

The Pemon settlement conforms to a widespread pattern among lowland South American tribes, in which the principal unit is a core of a patriarchal male with his daughters and their husbands who have married in. The settlement pattern can be thought of in terms of a collection of house-

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holds at different stages of development in a cycle that goes as follows: 1) upon marriage, the young male goes to the house of his father-in-law for his year or more of bride service, but continues to visit his own parents frequently and is often to be found in his father's house; 2) after the birth of a child, a man may elect to return to his father's settlement, but may just as well stay on at his father-in-law's; 3) upon the death of the father-in-law, a man may move his now-expanded family back to the settlement of his own father, or to some point near it. There is no hard and fast rule determining which of these options a man will take in a given situation. Sibling ties are very important and a man may well elect to live with his brother or sister after the death of his father-in-law. What is important from the Pemon point of view is that someone remain on in a settlement with an ageing father-in-law. Thus it often turns out that the youngest son-in-law remains to stay on with the father-in-law, elder males having successively budded off to return to their father's settlement area.

The constituent units of Pemon society are thus households and clusters of households composed of near kin. Large agglomerations of people are rare, though they seem to have been more prevalent in the 1930's and 40's, when the *capitán* system was in full operation. The *capitán*, or regional cacique, came into prominence in Pemon society with the advent of the white man, with labor outmigration in the latter part of the 19th century, and with the gradual adaptation of Pemon society to the rule of the Venezuelan government and to the English and Brazilian pressures from the east and south. The *capitán* is essentially the representative of a regional grouping of Pemon in the face of outside interests. He was until recently a patriarchal figure who had gathered around himself his sons and sons-in-law in order to form a large (45-60 persons) settlement and was acknowledged by other settlements in the region as a person of influence. The actual power wielded by the *capitán* was never much, again in the classic pattern for lowland South American groups, where the saying goes: "One word from the *capitán*, and everyone does as he pleases." In very recent (1960 to the present) times there has been an effort by Pemon to unite various regional *capitanes* under the leadership of an all-tribal headman, or *capitán general*. This unification, which was undertaken to face the criollo government with a *de facto* organizational structure for the protection of Pemon interests, is tenuous and represents a kind of political organization foreign to the Pemon. Pemon are unified culturally and in terms of social structure, but are not and have not been unified politically over the course of their recent history.

The *capitán* system, or system of regional caciques, is important in the organization of two aspects of Pemon life: work in the alluvial diamond mines which provides money input to the Pemon economy, and relations with the criollo society to which the Pemon are currently articulated. The *capitán* also serves as a counselor in disputes among the Pemon themselves, that is, he has a semi-judicial position with respect to his own people, or at least with respect to those in his immediate area. It is difficult to define strictly the area of influence of one of these *capitanes*, since there is such wide variation in forcefulness of personality, in political sagacity, and in willingness to assume responsibility toward immediate followers. The *capitán* is in no sense a big man, eternally involved in status-validating rituals, feasts, and trading. There are *capitanes* who are little involved in trade, as well as men heavily involved in trade who are *not capitanes*. There is no necessary overlap between the *capitán* system and the trade system, though, as will be described in detail below, trade may at times be channeled through the *capitán* if none of the normal kinship or partnership channels are open for trading in a specific instance.

II. THE KINSHIP SYSTEM IN BRIEF

The Pemon practice bilateral cross-cousin marriage, which is always contracted with reference to Ego's father's generation. The key figures in male Ego's marriage choice are his father's and mother's siblings; the maximum genealogy is the following:

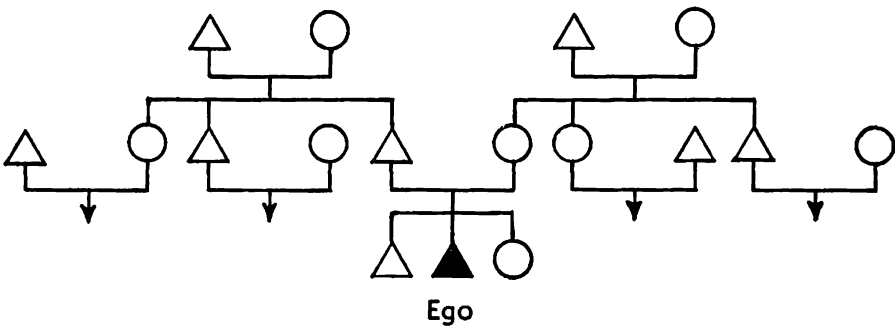


FIG. 1

Second cousin ties are generally not traced genealogically and persons are extensively reclassified on the basis of spatial proximity to a given Ego.

If a person lives near, he must be a kinsman, though some kinsmen (genealogical sense) live far away. An individual Ego's classification of kinsmen is a function of his or her father's classification of kinsmen. In Ego's $G + 1$, Ego's father can classify heads of settlement who are genealogically unrelated to him as either /uyese/ (brother-in-law/male cross-cousin) or /urui/ (elder brother), /uyakon/ (younger brother). Male Ego's classification of the male descendants will be either /uyese/ or /urui/, /uyakon/ respectively. Marriages (for male Ego) then become possible with the sisters of those whom Ego calls /uyese/ and prohibited with the sisters of those whom Ego calls /urui/, /uyakon/.

A detailed description of the operation of the Pemon kinship system would have to discuss the reclassification of people in terms of space. This reclassification is very problematic, since it involves multiple criteria, including: 1) spatial proximity; 2) adoptive relationship (no distinction between own and adopted children is made by Pemon); 3) affinal connections (affines with whom there is no traceable genealogical link may be converted into consanguineals with the Pemon terminology). The major point here is that the shallow genealogies of the Pemon correspond to a great flexibility in reclassifying people. The brother-in-law/male cross-cousin relationship (/uyese/) is, as might be expected, a strong one in terms of trading ties, and many trading histories show a strong preference to trade items in all spheres of exchange with /uyese/.

Long distance marriage links are particularly important for trade. Where long distance marriage links do exist (Pemon tend to marry close at hand, both genealogically and spatially), they are exploited to the fullest in bringing goods into a regional pool of goods.

Each individual operates in the kinship realm with what is essentially a kind of kindred, extendable laterally through ties in Ego's $G + 1$. Despite the lateral extendability of the kindred, most trade in the smaller items tends to be concentrated in the hands of first-order kin, found in $G. 0$ and $G + 1$ in the above genealogical representation.

It is most difficult to define exactly the limits of Pemon kinship calculations outside of the first-order genealogical space presented above. The term for male cross-cousin/brother-in-law, /uyese/, is in practice also a greeting term for any male of Ego's generation to whom kinship ties are *not* traced; thus in any given instance of use of the term, it is difficult to determine where kinship leaves off and trade partnerships begin: terminologically there may be no distinction made between the distant kinsman,

actually classified as /uyese/, or the trade partner, who rates the courtesy usage of the same term.

It is also difficult, without going into the actual spatial distribution of settlements and the specifics of relations *between* settlements, to give an accurate description of how the Pemon kinship system functions in practice. The accurate treatment of this topic requires a behaviorist description of actual clusters of kin, with an analysis of the types of relationships expressed by the composition of actual households. A full-scale analysis of Pemon settlement and household composition with reference to the kinship system is not undertaken here. Nevertheless, it is possible to say something about the operation of the kinship system in general. Pemon have a word /uyomba/, meaning "kinsman" or "relative" which is used in the same loose way that the word "relative" is in the U.S. There are no precise limits to this concept, and persons who are spatially close to Ego will be considered kin, whether or not they are genealogically traceable. But this reclassification does not extend radially outward from Ego's own location. In fact certain nearer settlements will be skipped over or bypassed for farther ones in the calculations made by a given Ego.

In the northwest corner of the Uonkén area are located two settlements, Kamadak and Privoi, one-half hour apart. In terms of kinship classification, there is a relation between the two settlements though one of them, Privoi, is formed from an extended matrifocal family of immigrants to the Uonkén area. The principal kinship connections of Kamadak are four hours away in the Uonkén Old Mission area and are, in genealogical terms:

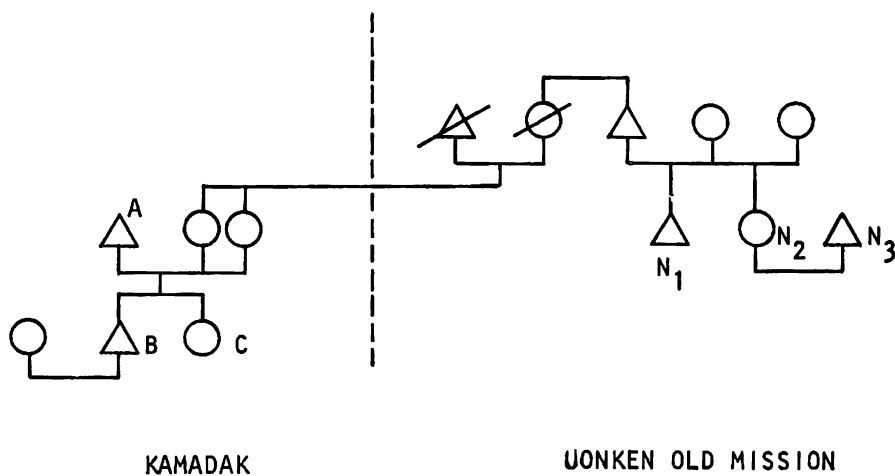


FIG. 2

while the connections to the neighboring settlement, Pirvoi, are:

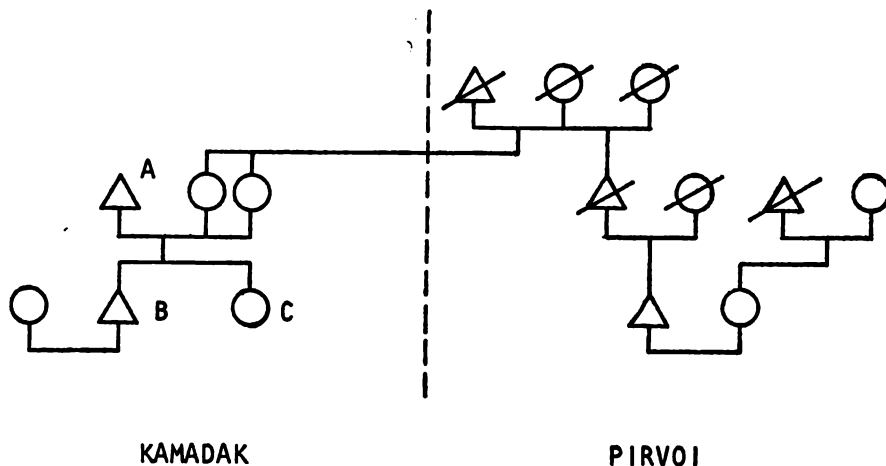


FIG. 3

It would appear that the links through the wife's mother's brother should be, for A, the settlement head of Kamadak, somewhat weaker than those through wife's brother's son (the link to Pirvoi), especially since Pirvoi is a proximate settlement. Nevertheless, the links to Uonkén Old Mission are deemed stronger and in fact the wife's mother's brother's son relation for A is the closer tie. This is borne out by the terminological equations wife's mother's brother's son = /urui/ (elder brother term) while wife's brother's son = /upoitori/ (nephew term).

Trade is channeled through A's son B and daughter C to N₁, N₂, and N₃ extensively. A's son B is son-in-law to a man who trades quite actively and B trades actively in manioc graters. His sister C trades actively in bowls, fish nets, cotton hammocks, and graters, with those of Uonkén Old Mission primarily. Spatial proximity normally coincides with proximity in terms of kinship reckoning, but it may not do so in any given case. Each settlement must be looked at separately, first in terms of genealogical connections, then in terms of spatial proximity to the settlements of near kin.

III. ITEMS OF TRADE AND SPHERES OF EXCHANGE

The articles traded by Pemon individuals and shunted from household to household in a vast web of relations are relatively few in number: canoes,

shotguns, manioc graters, fish nets, bowls, bead necklaces, cotton hammocks, cotton baby carriers, and occasionally dogs, portable record players, bolts of cloth, and transistor radios. Spheres of exchange will be described first and then the intertribal exchange pattern will be discussed.

Canoes move from west to east, almost exclusively in return for a flow of shotguns coming from the east and south. The canoe trade, which has now fallen off considerably in comparison to the 1930's or 40's, was almost totally restricted to the intertribal domain, trade taking place between the Pemon and their western neighbors, the Makiritare (also Carib-speakers). With the current selling of canoes for cash and the extensive use of Makiritare canoes by white diamond seekers penetrating the valleys of the R. Paragua and R. Caroní, the intertribal trade in canoes has slowed down even as more came to be produced under the stimulation of a cash return for labor input. Pemon have very few canoemaking specialists and almost all the canoes on the Caroní (below Otovanta falls) and Paragua are Makiritare made.

The Makiritare make no distinction between the Pemon and their southernmost neighbors, the Makuxi, calling both Pemon and Makuxi: Makuxi. In the past, Makiritare trading voyages to the east from the R. Caura and R. Erebató often went all the way to Georgetown via the southern route, through Makuxi territory: R. Uraricoera, R. Branco, R. Essequibo. As criollo goods became more and more prevalent among the Pemon, in the 1920's and 30's, Makiritare voyaging changed and the Pemon became solidly entrenched both as trade partners and as middlemen for criollo goods desired by both Pemon and Makiritare.

It is convenient to think of the items traded in the Gran Sabana in terms of spheres of exchange. The Pemon do not make distinctions in the same sense. All trade goes under the single term /pawana/; the Makiritare are called /pawanaton/, or trading people, by the Pemon and the term /pawanaton/ is also used, at times, by eastern Pemon to designate Pemon living on the western boundary of the distribution in close contact with the Makiritare.

The eastern neighbors of the Pemon, the Akawai, found along the R. Paurima and Kamarang, also participate in the trade in manioc graters, which they acknowledge as having come from the "Muyungones" or Makiritare. They seldom undertake journeys westward into the area of the Pemon. Pemon do undertake eastward trips to the Akawai, since there is intermarriage between the two groups and Pemon are desirous of obtaining in trade the bead necklaces put together by the Akawai.

In the southeast corner of Venezuela, where the boundaries of Venezuela, Brazil, and Guayana meet live the Ingariko, another Carib-speaking group with whom the Pemon trade. Manioc graters move eastward from the Pemon to the Ingariko, and shotguns and bead necklaces move westward into Pemon territory. Large clay pots come westward across the borders, moving against blowguns and sometimes against other clay bowls of Pemon manufacture. Movement of trade items is overland by foot and by canoe where possible.

Finally, Pemon trade with their neighbors to the south, the Makuxi. There is considerable intermarriage between Pemon and Makuxi along the Brazilian-Venezuelan boundary. On the Brazilian side are located bilingual Pemon-Makuxi settlements. The trade in this case is almost exclusively shotguns moving against manioc graters, for which Pemon act as middlemen. A list of trade system items, their place of manufacture of origin, and their direction of movement, follows below (Pemon names for the articles are in parentheses):

| Item | Manufactured by | Destined for | Direction of movement |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| 1. manioc grater (/sumari/) | Makiritare | Pemon, Akawai, Makuxi, Ingariko | W → E W → E → S |
| 2. dugout canoe (/kanwa/) | Makiritare | Criollos, Pemon | W → E |
| 3. cotton hammock (/kami/) | Pemon | Makiritare | E → W |
| 4. shotgun (/arakaposa/) | Brazilians | Pemon, Makiritare | S → N → W |
| 5. bead necklaces (/kasuru/) | Akawai, Ingariko | Pemon, Makiritare | E → W |
| 6. blowgun (/kurak/) | Makiritare | Pemon | W → E |
| 7. clay bowl (/oini/) | Pemon (Kamarakoto) | Pemon, Makiritare | move west and east and south from Kamarata and Urimán |
| 8. clay bowl (/wairang/) | Ingariko | Pemon | E → W |
| 9. clay pot (/murai/) | Ingariko | Pemon | E → W |
| 10. fish net (/penti/; /ilu/) | Pemon | Pemon | all directions, often E → W |
| 11. baby carrier (/weinek/) | Pemon | Pemon, Makiritare | all directions |
| 12. wickerware | Makiritare | Pemon | W → E |

On the basis of frequency of exchange, we can delineate the following spheres of exchange:

- Sphere I: canoes, graters, shotguns.
- Sphere II: graters, hammocks, bead necklaces, baby carriers.
- Sphere III: all other items on the above list, but including small bead necklaces.

As noted above, Pemon do not make these kinds of distinctions. The list above is exhaustive and covers all of the items normally traded by the Pemon. Dogs, transistor radios, bolts of cloth, and record players are infrequent items of exchange and will not be considered here. A "sphere of exchange" in the present usage is defined as a set of customary equivalences which characterize delayed or simultaneous exchanges. Again it must be noted that Pemon lump *all* trade under the term /pawana/. The above division into spheres means that shotguns move against a bundle (four, five, or six) of graters or a canoe, and only against those items; that graters move against shotguns (four, five, or six per shotgun) or against hammocks (one to one) or bead necklaces (one against one, appropriate sizes), and against baby carriers (one small grater equals one full size baby carrier). Graters thus appear in two spheres but are not to be thought of as constituting any kind of standard of equivalence; likewise bead necklaces. Trades are made on the basis of the customary equivalence of the items involved and the rates of exchange are not only fixed but cannot be compared one against the other. Thus for example we could not say that one hammock is equal to one bead necklace on the grounds that both are equal to one grater (sphere II). Hammocks simply do not move against bead necklaces; the specificity of the rates of exchange is complete. The insulation of spheres is only partial.

Free gifts are not uncommon among Pemon, especially gifts to in-laws, but trading is recognized as such by Pemon and is a secular, distinct activity apart from gift-giving. This is not a system of ceremonial exchange, nor a system of rules which appeal to supernatural powers for justification. The justification for the customary equivalences which exist is tradition itself. Whatever magical associations may have existed in the past regarding trade relations, trading today is a secular pursuit. When bilingual Pemon are asked to translate /pawanabe/ ("standing in a trading relationship") they inevitably say: "*Estamos negociando*" (i. e., we are negotiating, coming to an agreement about relative values). What is being discussed in these negotiations is whether the goods involved fit the customary equivalences. Much

attention is paid to the quality and condition of use of the items traded. Pemon also distinguish between trade and purchase. Pemon are vehement about the fact that money does not change hands in true trading and are careful to maintain this distinction. They state that trade is an activity "among the *indígenas*" and deny any influence of the criollo monetary system, even though criollo money is a crucial aspect of the trade system seen as a whole.

Before proceeding further, the justification for calling the trading activities of the Pemon and their neighbors a system must be examined. The trade network is not a system in the sense of a set of interrelated parts, a change in one of which results in a change in the other. Nevertheless, in the sense of a set of interrelated activities all of which fall under the same rubric in the eyes of the Pemon, the trade system fulfills the criteria of a system. The set of activities that constitute the trade system — journeys, hospitality for trade partners, holding of and extension of credit, the actual act of trade itself (simultaneous exchange) all go together to form a unified complex of activities. Thus when threatened with a diminished supply of shotguns for trading purposes, the Pemon responded by saying in effect: "We will have to go back to the old way of trading graters for cotton hammocks, since we must keep the supply of graters coming at all costs." The importance of the manioc grater, over and beyond the other trade items, and the necessity of trade if only to maintain the supply of graters, are well illustrated by the above statement. The social imperative of trade is extremely strong.

Food items do not enter into trade exchanges, and no goods enter into the trading other than those listed above. Fixed rates mean that regardless of which party (seeker or provider) bears the travel or transport costs, the trader knows beforehand exactly how much is due him and how much he will have to pay. The equivalences change when items are allowed to enter into the money economy from the trade system; thus a new shotgun worth Bs. 150 (US\$ 33) at the Brazilian border (1969 price) is worth, in money terms, Bs. 400 (US\$ 90) by the time it arrives in Urimán on the R. Caroní. Yet no matter where the gun was traded it would be valued at five or six manioc graters, depending on just what condition the gun was in. With the exception of shotguns and graters, all other items in the system are traded exclusively in new condition.

The fixity of rates within the trade system is a characteristic of many indigenous trade systems, and it carries special significance for the Pemon trade system. With fixed rates, the trade system becomes a kind of ecological exploitation in which the more easterly savanna dwellers exploit the labor

power of those to the west of them. A relative poverty (of game for hunting, of fish) in the food-getting realm in the east is contrasted with the favored position of the easterners within the trade system. The goods obtained by the Pemon, acting as middlemen, e.g. the shotgun, move against labor-intensive goods, the graters and canoes. Thus the relatively capital-intensive Pemon, as middlemen, exploit their western neighbors, the Makiritare, at least as far as any kind of labor equivalence is a measure of value. Typically the Makiritare bear travel and transport costs, coming eastward from Santa María de Erebató as far as R. Tirika, a tributary of the Caroní (cf. map, p. 5). In the early 1960's a mission was set up at Santa María de Erebató. During my journey up the Paragua in July, 1970, stories were told by the Makiritare with whom I was traveling as to how the missionary at Santa María, seeing the exploitative relationship between the Pemon and Makiritare, told the Makiritare to demand a higher price for their chief product, manioc graters. It is significant that the Makiritare were satisfied with the trading equivalences until an outsider told them they were being unjustly treated. There is no conscious exploitation of the westernmost partners by the easternmost, but in the ecological sense a poorer zone is living off a richer one. Despite the admonitions, the Makiritare continue to trade with the Pemon, although the trade has fallen off some in recent years as the Makiritare themselves come more into contact with criollo communities in the lower Paragua and lower Caura (cf. COPPENS, 1971).

IV. SOURCE OF SUPPLY AND TRADE ROUTES

Clay bowls. The only source of clay in the region is in Kamarata and is utilized by people from Kamarata and one woman from the Urimán area, who makes the bowls from material transported from Kamarata overland by her husband and sons. Clay bowls move both westward and eastward from the Kamarata and Urimán areas. A second source for clay bowls and pots (/wairang/ and /murai/ types) is the /wei-tepī/ area just over the Brazilian border south of Mt. Roraima. There the manufacturers are Ingariko.

Canoes. Wood suitable for making canoes is found throughout the western part of the Pemon distribution, at least as far east as the valley of the R. Karuai. The Makiritare virtual monopoly of canoe manufacture is explained by the cultural division of labor between the Makiritare and the Pemon. In the Uonkén area, where the Makiritare canoes do not penetrate, two Pemon brothers who specialize in canoe-making construct canoes equal in every respect to those of the Makiritare.

Graters. The materials for graters, wood and discarded tin cans are obtainable as far east as the valley of the Caroní. Formerly the surface of the grater was spotted with stone flakes to provide the grating surface. Wood and stone graters are no longer in use; the teeth of the grater are cut by Makiritare women from scraps of tin cans, the source for which is the criollo communities in La Paragua or in Urimán.

Cotton Hammocks. Cotton hammocks are woven all over the savanna by Pemon women, using cotton grown and hand spun. Cotton is strictly a woman's affair as they do the planting, harvesting, spinning, and weaving themselves. Older women are perennially to be seen with fiber and spindle, spinning as they make conversation with their neighbors.

Shotguns. Brazilian manufacture. Brought across the Brazilian-Venezuelan border by Pemon in conjunction with Brazilian traders.

Fish Nets. Manufactured with local fibers all over the Gran Sabana. These move east to west, exclusively against the /oini/-type Kamarakoto clay bowl; the knowledge of fish net manufacture is widespread among Pemon women.

Baby Carriers. These baby slings are woven on a small hand loom by Pemon women with Pemon-cultivated cotton. They are infrequently traded against small manioc graters.

Bead Necklaces. Assembled by the Akawai and Ingariko east of the Venezuelan border, traded westward to the Pemon against manioc graters, and clay bowls. Very highly valued by the Makiritare to the west of the Pemon. These non-indigenous beads must initially be paid for in cash or labor; subsequently they are incorporated into the non-cash nexus of the trade system.

Blowguns. Manufactured by Makiritare and by Pemon; a relatively unimportant item, moving from west to east against small clay bowls, sometimes against cash payment (Bs. 10 to 15).

Principal trade routes follow the rivers cutting through the savanna and neighboring areas. The main routes from west to east run as follows (cf. map, p. 5): Santa María de Erebató, via R. Caura to C. Sabaru, portage to C. Mari-Mari on the R. Paragua, down R. Paragua to R. Karún, thence to R. Antabari, C. Abeki to Urimán; upstream from Urimán, via R. Tirika to the Gran Sabana (Uonkén area). From Urimán there is also an overland route to Kamarata, and from there to the seldom-used route to Kavanayén and beyond into Akawai territory in Kamarang and Paurima.

A more southerly route crosses the savanna in Uonkén, then runs across the R. Apanguao to R. Kukenán at Pravatavaka, hence beyond to the southern slopes of Mt. Roraima and over the border into Ingariko territory.

The relationship of the Pemon to the over-the-border traders is a market relationship, pure and simple. The trader makes his living selling shotguns and shells to all comers. Nevertheless stability of prices throughout the 1960's meant that the Pemon could count on turning what money they obtained in the alluvial diamond diggings into shotguns, and hence into manioc graters. The only method of internalizing the money economy or its products is the transformation of money into an item (shotguns or beads) which has value in the trade system. Pemon purchase a large number of household items directly from missions or at criollo centers in Santa Elena, Icabarú, and Urimán. Since the items purchased are clothes and household consumables such as kerosene and soap, the money spent on these items, after being made via the external economy of the diamond diggings or mission labor is immediately sent back out into the external economy via purchases from missionaries and merchants. Since Pemon sell their labor power, aside from mining, only in work at the Capuchin missions, and use the money thus obtained to purchase supplies from the mission, there are no paths for the internalization of the accrued value of labor power except through the trade system. Even so, men who are big traders (not to be confused with anything like the Melanesian big man) tend to be minimally involved in the diamond mining scene, obtaining shotguns and beads from those who are more involved.

V. TRADE RATE EQUIVALENCES

The following equivalences hold among the trade items listed above:

- 1 manioc grater = 1 cotton hammock, adult size
- 1 shotgun = 4, 5, or 6 manioc graters depending on the condition of use of the shotgun.
- 1 clay bowl (/oini/, mfg. Kamarakoto) = 1 fish net of appropriate size; also 1 clay bowl (/wairang/; mfg. Ingariko) appropriate size.
- 1 dugout canoe (8-10 meters) = 1 shotgun
- 1 bead necklace, appropriate size = 1 manioc grater
- 1 baby carrier = 1 small manioc grater
- 1 small basket = 1 small clay bowl, /oinĩ/ type

- 1 blowgun = 1 large clay pot (/murai/; Ingariko mfg.)
- 1 bead necklace, small size = 1 small /oini/ type bowl

"Of appropriate size" in the above means that a rough size equivalence of articles prevails, articles of a given standard size being exchanged against specific graduated sizes of the other article in the trade. This size equivalence pervades the entire realm of Pemon exchange. A larger clay bowl moves against a larger bead necklace and so on through all the articles listed. Manioc graters vary in size from 9 cm by 30 cm up through 60 cm by 75 cm with several gradations in between. Average size for a grater is 45 cm by 68 cm. Size equivalence is maintained in a rough but consistent way, and three sizes of manioc graters move against three sizes of bead necklaces.

The bead necklaces require special comment, since they are able to be broken down and built up at will, and since they can move against more than one corresponding article, i.e. against both graters and bowls (note that graters and bowls are not exchanged one for the other directly.) These beads have their source in Georgetown and ultimately in Italy, the U.S. or Japan. They come to the Pemon via the Akawai and Ingariko to the east and move into Pemon territory in trade for manioc graters or bowls. They are highly valued by the Makiritare and move against manioc graters in Pemon-Makiritare trades. The potential breaking of necklaces might seem to make the beads a kind of standard of value, and a means by which value can be held and accumulated. This is a misleading impression however. The insulation of the exchanges involving beads means that the beads are *not* a standard of value for the other items being traded. The Pemon distinction between money transactions and trade must be borne in mind, even though beads are ultimately purchased with money at the eastern edges of Pemon tribal territory, and/or by the Akawai in contact with white traders. Beads can be purchased by the Pemon from the Akawai along the Venezuela-Guayana border and along the Venezuela-Guayana-Brazil border near Mt. Roraima for Bs. 20 per kilo, unstrung (in the period 1968-69). Just to demonstrate the lack of continuity of value of items between the trade system and the money economy through and around which it operates, I will make the attempt to translate the value of beads into that of a manioc grater 1) using money equivalents and 2) using trade system equivalents.

The Makiritare currently insist that a large regular manioc grater is worth Bs. 50, irrespective of its place of sale or the distance from place of origin to place of purchase. In the trade system a grater would move against a bundle of beads weighing 400-500 grams valued at most Bs. 10. In the trade system the exchange is seen as proper. Customary equivalence prevails,

despite the inroads made by money in the act of purchasing outside the trade system the article in question. Inside and outside are not to be understood in the spatial sense but in the sociological sense, since money has penetrated even to the most remote Pemon settlements and all Pemon and many of their Makiritare neighbors to the west have experience in money transactions with criollos. If the grater (valued at Bs. 50 in money terms) were to move against a shotgun (say five graters for the gun) we again find that the money valuations do not correspond to the trade system rates. Thus five graters at Bs. 50 = Bs. 250. The shotgun against which they move is valued at Bs. 150 at the Brazilian border (1969 price) and at Bs. 400 at Urimán on the R. Caroní, a week's journey inland by foot and canoe. Nevertheless, five or six graters equal one shotgun, if the trade is made according to the trade system rules, in Urimán or elsewhere.

When the money price of a given item goes up (the price of a shotgun recently rose from Bs. 150 to Bs. 250), the Pemon react by holding on to the item or stockpiling, since they have a very limited supply of cash and cannot count on getting a replacement for the given item with future cash payments. The trade system can thus be slowed down or even halted by increases in price of items at the edges of the system. The supply-demand pattern operates in times of fixed prices by an increased frequency of trading rates do not change but people do more or less trading, expanding or contracting their own networks of partners and kinsmen. Price levels at the borders of the system (which roughly correspond to the geographical borders of Venezuela), *in the short run*, thus do have a determining effect, not on the rates within the trade system, but on the velocity of flow of items through that system.

Eventually increases in money price of items does affect the system itself. Thus dugout canoes are more and more being paid for in cash and appear less frequently in trade system transactions. What surprises one is not the rapidity with which money payments for an item result in gradual exclusion of that item from the trade system, but the tenacity of the trade system rates in the face of the challenge of money valuation. This tenacity of rates would appear to have several sources: 1) the need for manioc graters among Pemon, Akawai, and Makuxi is strong and it is relatively important that some avenue for direct exchange remain open; many households would not be able to muster enough cash to purchase graters at the Bs. 50 or Bs. 100 price level. Cash is usually committed to the purchase of criollo articles. Pemon need widespread access to graters. The trade system provides this access to all, even to those who cannot muster cash. 2) The

conversion rates for graters, when traded against beads or against shotguns *are very favorable to Pemon*. Bs. 10 worth of beads can be exchanged for a grater valued at Bs. 50. A Bs. 150 shotgun, as we have seen above can be exchanged for four, five, or six graters, valued at Bs. 200, 250 or 300 respectively.

VI. TRADE PARTNERSHIPS

The trade partnership is a principal means of transmitting goods in Pemon society. Essentially the trade partnership is a device for moving goods over fairly long distances, in the gray area where kinship links are attenuated and eventually disappear. It is a distance conquering mechanism, both in social and geographical terms. Below are two accounts of the origin of two trade partnerships, one to the east of Uonkén and one to the west.²

1. In 1966 Oswald was working the mines at Parueta, near Santa Elena de Uairén. With him was the nephew of Frank, who lives near Kumarakapai on the R. Yuruaní. They heard that there was something doing near Yuruaní and so both went north. Oswald stayed three months with Frank's family, never did find any diamonds. At the end of Oswald's visit, Frank gave him a bunch of bead necklaces and asked Oswald to see if he could get him some graters for them. Oswald took the beads and got the graters — thus the trade partnership began. Subsequently Frank made the trip west to Oswald's house (in the Uonkén area) to pick up the graters, bringing with him more beads for further trading. Oswald says the trip takes four days from his house to Frank's house.

2. Richard gives the following account of the origin of a trade partnership between his brother Bill and Paul of Kuyumeru, R. Antabari. Paul and Bill had known each other for some time before they became trading partners. Richard says Paul was from the Roraima area and emigrated (married in) to Antabari. Bill was given large numbers of cotton hammocks and beads by people to the south of him, but having no graters himself to trade with, went to Antabari, to Paul, looking for an outlet. Richard says that the Makiritare "liked the business" with beads and hammocks and thus the partnership was established, with Paul acting as broker for the Makiritare involved in the trades.

² The names in these and following accounts are fictitious. The personalities and relationships described are real.

At the time of Bill's death in 1965, Paul had just arrived from Antabari on a trading visit to Uonkén. Bill died immediately after Paul's arrival, and Paul disposed of his graters in individual negotiations with a variety of people, stating that he did not wish to continue subsequent trading trips. At this point, Richard, Bill's son-in-law, and Bill's son-in-law's brother stepped in and offered to be jointly responsible for things at the Uonkén end, with Bill's son-in-law holding primary responsibility. Richard says they asked Paul to continue trading, emphasizing the need of the people in the Uonkén area for graters.

Several points are extremely important in these two accounts. The obligation to trade, once an initial gift has been given, is strong enough to create the trade partnership. In both 1 and 2 above, the protagonists had known each other prior to entering on the trading relationship, and the desire to trade was made manifest by the needs of one side of the partnership. The trade system operates according to a principle of direct reciprocity. The seemingly fortuitous establishment of the relationship in 1 above is belied by the obligatory nature of the gift, once hospitality of the partner has been accepted by the partner-to-be. Oswald was obliged to continue trading with Frank. Gifts between persons unrelated by kinship ties often initiate trade partnerships. Persons trading with kinsmen can afford to be more or less lax since trade bonds can be added to or superimposed upon kinship bonds with little or no effect on the bonds themselves.

Spatial proximity, aside from the fact that most close kin live close (for any given Ego), plays an important part in determining who will participate in a given trading trip or a given trading session. In account 2 above, Bill got items from "people to the south" which he then funneled into his trade partnership with Paul. Thus he acted as intermediary or agent for a much wider spectrum of persons than just his own kinsmen. Bill tapped a subregional pool of goods; the people around him utilized his special relationship to Paul to satisfy their needs for graters.

VII. *ROLE OF KINSHIP IN TRADE*

Aside from three or four renowned traders, known throughout the Gran Sabana among the Pemon, the trade system is channeled through kinship links, primarily through the brother-in-law and/or father-in-law/son-in-law (mother's brother/sister's son) relationships. This channeling may be better understood through a concrete example. At Uonkén Old Mission, Xavier had married into the local group. Xavier hails from the R. Yuruaní area,

four days to the east. In frequent visits to the Uonkén Old Mission area, with return visits by Xavier, Xavier's brother brings in large quantities of bead necklaces. These necklaces are then traded against graters in the Uonkén Old Mission area and the graters are taken back to the Yuruaní area by Xavier's brother. What is important here is that this long-distance marriage link serves to connect two regional "pools" of goods — one in Uonkén and one in the Yuruaní area. I use the term "pools" of goods to indicate that, at the time of the actual trading trip, Xavier's brother, who brings the bead necklaces with him on a westward journey, does not know exactly with whom he will be trading. In contrast to the trade partnership, Xavier's brother has no assured trading connection in the Uonkén Old Mission area; he is not obliged to trade only with his brother, but may scout around in the area and find people who will trade with him. The people with whom Xavier's brother trades may be close affinal relations of Xavier or they may not be. What is assured is that the people with whom Xavier's brother trades will probably live proximate to Xavier. If Xavier's brother does not find people willing to trade among those proximate to Xavier, he may go farther afield in search of someone to trade with. Xavier's brother does not have to channel his trading through Xavier, yet he can count on his brother's help in finding people with whom to trade. His brother may also leave goods "on consignment" to Xavier, and return at a later date, or wait for a visit of Xavier to the east, to obtain the goods due him.

The assemblage of persons from the region at Bill's house during Paul's visits to the Uonkén area represents another means of channeling, somewhat independently of kinship. Upon Paul's arrival at Bill's house, men and women from the south converged on Bill's house to offer goods in trade for manioc graters. It is testimony to the importance of spatial proximity in trading, that virtually no distinction was made between Bill's close kin and those from the south in organizing the trades. Goods from the subregional pool of goods were channeled through Bill, utilizing the trade partnership to the maximum.

Both in trading through kin and through the trade partnership an important factor is the ability of the seeker of goods to draw on a subregional pool of goods to satisfy his wants. The trade partnership does not limit the supply of goods in trade: it rather expands, through the broker-type role of Bill, the possibilities of trade for the visiting partner by assembling everyone in the area who has a desire to trade at the time of the visit. Since Bill's trade connections were well known, several persons left goods with him "on consignment", to be traded for them by him. It should be noted that

no particular prestige attaches to the broker role, though it may be significant that Bill was known in the Uonkén area as a *capitán* as well as a trader.

VIII. HOUSEHOLDS AND TRADE ITEMS

The two most important items in the trade system, graters and shotguns, are crucial for the performance of Pemon subsistence tasks. The shotgun, since its advent with the muzzle-loaders of the early part of this century, has become an integral part of a hunting pattern which had become increasingly individualized as time goes on. Shotguns are seldom loaned out and the possession of a shotgun is now deemed necessary for hunting, taking the place of hunting with bow and arrow and curare poison.

Pemon strongly emphasize the need for manioc graters in their subsistence pattern and strongly assert that a social imperative of keeping the graters moving has existed since their forefathers' day. Pemon maintain that they do not know how to make the graters, though when pressed on the matter and asked what they would do if the grater trade stopped entirely, they admit that they might be able to manufacture the graters themselves. Whether or not the lost art of grater-making is really lost is an important question which I am unable to answer definitively. For the past seventy years at least, Pemon and Akawai graters have come from the Makiritare.

To gain a feel for the movement and possession of trade items within Pemon society, it is necessary to look closely at a number of households and identify the pattern of ownership and use of trade items. Surprisingly enough many of the graters which do lengthy service in the Pemon household are owned by the women, having been traded by the women on their own account, usually for a cotton hammock or a baby carrier. Women participate vigorously in trade, particularly in trades involving bead necklaces, graters, and baby carriers (sphere II). Women do not generally participate in trades involving the items of sphere I. Also many times it is the women of the household who are the repositories of knowledge as to who owns what and what constitutes value in an item. In one instance, observed by the author on the R. Antabari in July, 1970, a Pemon man called in his wife to inspect and assay the qualities of a grater he was about to swap with his Makiritare trading partner. She was asked to pass judgment on the quality of the grater and on the validity of the prospective equivalence with a bead necklace being offered by the Pemon man to his partner. Once she approved the article, the trade was consummated.

A further illustration of the role of women in trade, particularly in the intertribal domain, is the uncertainty of a Pemon trader (one of the most active traders in the tribal interface in the middle reaches of the R. Paragua) when asked by the author to run through the equivalences and destinations of a lot of thirty-one manioc graters changing hands on a single day. The wife of his Makiritare trade partner was called in to verify the equivalences. The Pemon trader had difficulty keeping all the graters straight and had to call on the wife of his trading partner to pin down who was getting what.

Within Pemon society itself, graters owned and used by a given household are as likely as not held by the women. This applies particularly to those graters which are actually in use and are not intended for future trades. It should be clear at this point that in talking about a trading system we are talking about ties which link every Pemon household to a number of trading contacts, both within and eventually without Pemon society itself. By far the greatest number of these contacts are with other Pemon households, mostly with near kin and affines. Household inventories of trade system items were taken in 1970-71, and some of them will be examined to illustrate the pattern of trading and holding of items at the household level.

The first household listed is that of a heavy trader in shotguns in the years 1965-70. On hand at the time of the inventory were seven graters, three new, four used. Two of the new ones were obtained in a trip to Paul's, at Kuyumeru, R. Antabari, in Nov., 1970. This was a trade partnership relationship, with the Pemon trader accompanied by men who were trading partners of Paul, and succeeded Bill in this trade partnership. The two graters were obtained in trade for bead necklaces, the origin of which was a trade with a trade partner to the east of Uonkén. The trade may be thought of as a four-stage process:

- 1) Oswald's trading partner to the east gives him two bead necklaces of the requisite size for grater equivalence, sometime in 1969, on the occasion of a visit from Oswald.
- 2) In late 1970, Oswald takes the bead necklaces with him to Paul, former trade partner of Bill, and obtains two graters.
- 3) After returning from his western journey, Oswald sends a message to his trade partner to the east, advising him that his two graters are on hand.
- 4) Oswald's trading partner comes westward to Oswald's place and collects his due, and clears his past debts for prior trades with Oswald.

In general a pattern of reciprocal trips is maintained with the seeker after goods doing the traveling and bearing the travel costs. Since prices

are fixed, supply and demand operate through the medium of travel costs, as well as through the intensity of visiting (number of trips per period of time). It would be wrong to over-formalize the nature of trading relations. Often the events of a trading trip themselves determine the outcome of a trading venture. In Oswald's trip under 1) above he left three graters at the house of an old woman along the R. Apanguao which were paid for on the spot for bead necklaces. This represented a casual aside to his main trading objective, yet it accounted for three of the nine graters which he took on the trip to trade and was consummated on the spot (no delayed exchange, as is most often the case with the trade partnership relation).

I have only accounted for two of the seven graters on hand at Oswald's. One of the remaining five graters was exchanged by Oswald's wife with Paul (Bill's trading partner) on one of Paul's trading visits to Uonkén Old Mission. Three of the graters were obtained in trade with Oswald's brother's wife's sister's daughter's husband, a relationship which reduces to father-in-law/son-in-law, within the Uonkén area itself, and one grater was obtained by Oswald's wife in trade with a woman to whom no kin relation could be traced. The trade with Oswald's "son-in-law" was made for a shotgun, the rate being six graters for the gun (three of the graters from this trade remained unaccounted for by the informant).

| Household # | N° Graters | | Graters from | |
|-------------|------------|------|--------------|---------|
| | New | Used | Kin | Non-kin |
| 1 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 3 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 3 |
| 4 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| 5 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| 6 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| 8 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 5 |
| 9 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 4 |
| 10 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 5 |

The above figures for a representative non-random sample of households in two areas within the Uonkén area show the following about grater-holding: 1) most of the graters on hand are new, hence still possible trade items (they may be traded in the future); 2) most of the graters are obtained

from non-kin. This reflects the fact that most of the grater trade in the Uonkén area in the 1960's was channeled through Bill's trade partnership and through another, kinship relationship involving a very active trader.

There is little correlation between size of household and degree of involvement in the trade system, though several very large households are extensively involved.

IX. *THE SMALLER ITEMS*

In spheres II and III of the list of trade system items are found bead necklaces of various sizes, cotton hammocks, baby carriers, clay bowls, and fish nets. These smaller items tend to be traded primarily among kinsmen and only secondarily via the trade partnerships which characterize the trades in sphere I (and partially, in sphere II as well). Seldom do Pemon go on a visit to their geographically furthest kinsmen without taking along a bowl or fish net to trade. These smaller items — bowls and fish nets particularly — are with increasing frequency being valued in money terms. Depending on the size, the Kamarakoto /oini/ bowl is valued at Bs. 10, Bs. 5, or Bs. 3. The fish nets against which the bowls often move are worth Bs. 5, Bs. 4, or Bs. 3 (1970 prices). The graduated money scale of value corresponds to the size differences in bowls and nets. This maintenance of a size hierarchy in the valuation of the bowls and nets shows how strong is the underlying principle of size equivalence within the trade system, while the lack of correspondence between the two money scales involved shows how arbitrary are the money valuations placed on the items. Over the long run, if the trade system survives, the money valuations may come into closer alignment with the customary rates, before the customary rates are forgotten and the money economy comes to dominate completely.

Bowls, as was noted above, move against fish nets and small bead necklaces. Most often the fish nets are of local manufacture and there is little that is special in their being traded. The small bead necklaces, on the other hand, are from outside the trade system and are as highly desired as the bowls. There is a tendency for the bead necklaces not to be broken down or built up in their course from one end of the system to another. Most of the time a small bead necklace will be traded against a bowl rather than be broken down in order to build up a larger bead necklace which would be traded against, say, a grater. This tendency for goods to continue across the trade system in a series of transactions which are the same at each point where they are traded, is crucial for the maintenance of a fixed-rate system.

Were bead necklaces to be broken down extensively in their east-west transit, the fixed-rate system would soon be replaced by a unitary scale of equivalents in bead necklace terms. That they are not often broken down is testimony to the strength of the customary rates.

Free gifts seem to be more common with items of sphere III than with items in spheres I and II. Trade and gift-giving are much harder to differentiate for the items of sphere III than for items in the other two spheres. Gift-giving of these smaller items forms part of the cement which holds kinship ties together.

X. BIG TRADERS

Men who are very active in the trade system, mostly in spheres I and II type trades, are located in relatively few areas on the western fringe of the Pemon distribution. We have seen the role played by Bill's trading partner Paul, of R. Antabari, in supplying persons in the Uonkén area with manioc graters. Almost due south of Antabari, at a place called Avikara (Cachimbo) in the upper reaches of the Caroní, we find a big trading center. That Avikara is such a trading center (along with the Urimán area) is due in no small part to the presence of John, who trades very actively within the Uonkén and Urimán areas. His daughter is married into a settlement in the Uonkén area and lives patrilocally, in contrast to the matrilocal pattern often found among Pemon. Through his son-in-law and his son-in-law's father, John injects a continuous supply of graters into the Uonkén subregional pool of goods. Constantly voyaging back and forth among Urimán, Avikara and the Uonkén area (via the R. Tirika), John has made long trading trips to the west as far as Santa María de Erebató and is bilingual in Pemon and Makiritare. While he maintains trade partners to the west, his main outlets for goods to the east are through his extensive kinship connections in Urimán and his one son-in-law in Uonkén. The Uonkén channel looks like this genealogically:

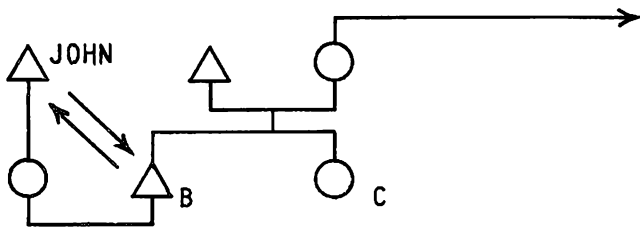


FIG. 4

while his Urimán connections are as follows:

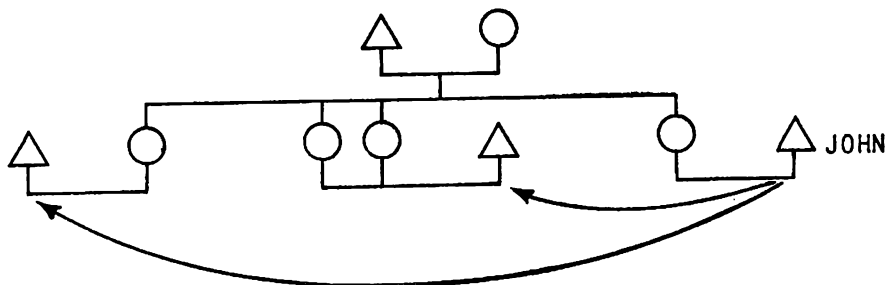


FIG. 5

Thus John has not only the support of numerous brothers-in-law in the Urimán area (all of the wife's sisters' husbands in the diagram above stand in /uyese/ or brother-in-law relationship to John) but also the son-in-law relation in Uonkén through which to find outlets for whatever goods come to him through his Makiritare trading partners.

XI. TRADING JOURNEYS

In order to give some idea of the actual contacts and types of social relations evidenced in trading activity itself, I will recount a journey made with one Pemon and two Makiritare traders up the rivers Paragua, Karún and Antabari in July, 1970. Mike, a Pemon trader of Toima, R. Antabari, and his Makiritare trading partner, Jack, were returning upriver to their respective homes at Toima and Parupa and were concluding the exchange of a large number of graters and several canoes. Both the graters and canoes were exchanged against shotguns, though there were some graters which had been exchanged for bolts of cloth and cotton hammocks. Mike as traveling with Jack and a crew of Makiritare upstream to Parupa where he would pick up a canoe owed him by Jack and then be transported with the canoe in tow back to Toima. Also on board was another Makiritare, Chad, who was on his way to Sabanon, R. Antabari, to trade with a Pemon trading partner at the latter's home. Two canoe-making specialists were traveling with Chad to make up on the spot several canoes which Chad owed his trading partner.

At the end of a two-day trip with a twenty-horsepower Johnson outboard motor on the back of the canoe, we arrived at Parupa, site of a Makiritare

village (the Makiritare settlement, divided into an upper and a lower part, numbered 80-100 at the time of my visit) where Mike and I were put up at Jack's house. Mike proved to be quite anxious for the trip to Toima to get underway, and kept proclaiming (to me) that if he had an outboard motor we would not have had the two-day layover which arranging for another canoe and some repairs on the motor required. Mike was visibly nervous at having to partake so much of his trade partner's hospitality. During the two days, a lot of some thirty-one graters was extracted from the loft of Jack's house and set out to be bundled by Mike. During the two days there was constant checking back and forth between Mike and Jack (aided by his wife) to assure that the proper equivalences had been made and that everyone, including those destined to receive the graters from Mike, got his just due. Some of the graters were "on consignment", that is, Mike was acting as a broker. There were no wrangling sessions or disputes, however, and on the third day after arriving in Parupa we got on our way again. After a second two-day journey, in which no fewer than three rapids had to be traversed by portage, we arrived at Sabanon, where the journey was concluded. Chad and his two canoe specialists and I were put up in the house of Chad's Pemon trading partner. I was later informed that Chad and the canoe-making specialists stayed on there for two months finishing a total of ten eight- to ten-meter canoes which were left with the Pemon partner against past and future payments. Chad had come, not only to supervise the building of the canoes for his trading partner, but also for trading graters. Three or four graters changed hands on the second day after our arrival, as Pete (the Pemon) and his wife pulled out several bulky bead necklaces to pay off Chad. The most interesting facet of the actual trading sessions was the role played by Pete's wife as she conferred with her husband on the proper equivalences between graters and beads. She passed on the validity of each of the exchanges that were concluded.

Horace, of Kunkén, R. Tirika, is an adopted son of trader John and himself trades directly with Makiritare from Parupa who come to his home at Kunkén. Horace carried out the following series of trades in 1969-70: In Oct., 1969, at Kunkén, Horace obtained fourteen graters, as follows from his Makiritare trading partner:

| | | |
|------------------|---|------------------|
| from Horace | | from his partner |
| 1 shotgun | ⇒ | 7 graters |
| 7 bead necklaces | ⇒ | 7 graters |

This trade was effected on the spot and the Makiritare left with the shotgun and bead necklaces.

In Dec., 1970, Horace brought fourteen graters with him to Kamadak, the previously mentioned settlement on the northwest fringe of the Uonkén area. Horace said at that time that he trades in Uonkén to get shotguns so that he can make a trip west (probably to Santa María de Erebató) with his Makiritare trading partner. The trip west was to be made sometime after Jan., 1971, and Horace expects to come to Uonkén again, with the trader John, in July, 1971, or thereabouts. The trip west had projected trading for canoes, which would be brought back to Kunkén.

Horace ran into a man at Kamadak who was there for a Christmas celebration and had a shotgun available for trade. Horace then undertook the following trade:

| | | |
|-------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| from Horace | | from Fellow Pemon, distant kin |
| 7 graters | ⇒ | 1 shotgun |

Note that Horace passed on the "extra" graters over and above the usual five or six demanded for a shotgun to his fellow Pemon. Horace could have turned a "profit" by trading only five or six graters, but he did not do so, possibly because he felt he needed the shotgun urgently and because he was aware that the border traffic in shotguns was slowing down markedly.

Horace took the remaining seven graters into the Uonkén Old Mission area and traded two of them with his "father-in-law" (wife's sister's husband's father) for a shotgun as follows:

| | | |
|-------------|---|----------------------|
| from Horace | | from "father-in-law" |
| 2 graters | ⇒ | 1 shotgun |

Three graters remained to be paid at a later date. Horace took advantage of his kinship relationship with his "father-in-law" in order to be granted credit and thus obtain more shotguns for his impending trip westward for graters and canoes. The remaining five graters were disposed of in trades at Uonkén Old Mission. After Horace makes the trip westward with his Makiritare trading partner and concludes his trading for canoes and graters, bringing back the canoes to Kunkén, the trading will have come full circle:

Kunkén—Uonkén-Kunkén-Makiritare settlements—Kunkén.

In this case, as in almost all the cases recorded in my notes, it is the seeker after goods who bears the travel costs; you bear travel costs when you are going after something you want badly enough to make the trip.

XII. CAPITANES AND TRADERS

Kumarakapai is an Adventist Pemon community on the R. Yuruaní in the east central portion of the Pemon distribution. At the time of my visit there in August, 1970, several men from a settlement on the R. Kama, two days' journey on foot to the north, had come to Kumarakapai on a trading venture. The *capitán* of Kumarakapai had this to say about their venture: "Those from Kama come to make a trade of graters for a shotgun. An old shotgun is worth four graters. The graters come from Uonkén to Kama or from Kamarata to Kama. They give the graters to the *capitán*, in order that the *capitán* obtain from others the articles that they want. The value of the graters here is Bs. 50 for a middle-sized grater, Bs. 100 for a large one, and Bs. 40 for a small one. Those from Kama have to wait until they obtain the shotgun. After they obtain it they will return home. If they do not obtain it, they will return home and come again later". This passage is important for several reasons: 1) it illustrates the fact that a *capitán*, in the absence of a trade partnership, may be the broker in a given trade; 2) delayed exchange is permissible though not necessarily desired in trades channeled through a *capitán*.

The role of the *capitán* in Pemon society appears to have changed little over the years: the informality and lack of *de facto* power characteristic of the office are the same today as they were in the 1930's and 40's. SIMPSON (1940:525) states: "The cacique is respected and can have first place in dividing up benefits, but receives no emolument in either work or merchandise, and in the particularly democratic and individualistic society that is the tribe, he is considered merely as one additional person, though an outstanding one. His duties are as vague as they are light. He arbitrates the few differences that come up among families, represents the tribe in negotiations with other (tribes) or with whites, directs community enterprises and generally acts as father of his people." Simpson does not elaborate on exactly what community enterprises the *capitán* participates in, but one of these must surely be trade.

The *capitán* is not part of a big man syndrome, and merely serves as a broker for trades in which the more conventional kinship links or the trade partnership are lacking. The *capitán* hasn't sufficient scope of influence to dominate trade in a given area, except by being party to a trade partnership himself. Pemon authority patterns simply do not coalesce and the individuation of roles keeps power diffuse and maintains the "democratic and individualistic society that is the tribe." Trade reflects this and the only way to conceive

of the trade system is as a vast network of parallel and cross-cutting bonds expressed in the items I have listed, among egalitarian partners who adhere to the system by following along one and all with the same set of rates and size equivalences. The *capitán*, like trade partners and trade-connected kin, subscribes to the same set of rules.

XIII. TRADE RULES AND MARRIAGE RULES

Thus far I have said nothing about the trade system and Pemon social structure. Pemon social structure is complex in its very simplicity; bilateral cross-cousin marriage and sister exchange with reference to $G + 1$ above a given Ego are all that is needed to explain the structure of Pemon marriage. There is no lineage structure in Pemon, and each generation truncates its genealogical reckoning two generations up from its own. Cross-cousin marriage is always with reference to $G + 1$ or to G . O, since, as previously mentioned, second-cousin ties (through $G + 2$) are seldom genealogically traced and certainly do not play a significant part in marriage ties. Thus the crucial unit in Pemon is the brother-sister pair, from which marriageable pairs are descended, i.e.

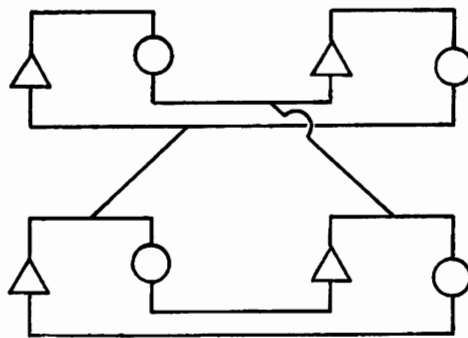


FIG. 6

or rather the following type of "open" structure, in which

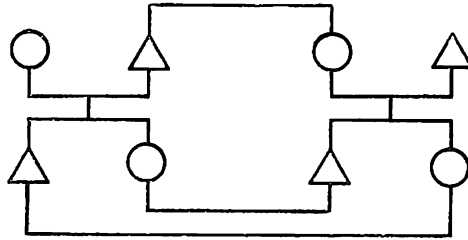


FIG. 7

the descendants of a single brother-sister pair intermarry. This open structure is very commonly encountered in Pemon genealogies, and the kinds of several-generation structures which result look like the following:

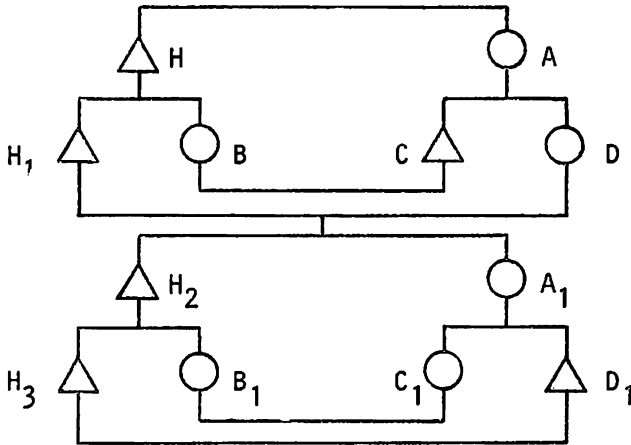


FIG. 8

This represents a kind of involutorial structure which, by forgetting females at a specific point, keeps working inward on itself spinning off the female of a brother-sister pair in alternate generations, and eliminating her descendants from the exchange structure. There is no patrilineal bias in this system, but a pseudo-patrilineal bias appears since it is the women who drop out of the structure (and out of the genealogies). Thus B and B₁ in the above diagram are shown as not having descendants i.e. they pertain to another parallel

structure to that which is shown, the parallel structure of another pseudo-patrilineage corresponding to $H - H_1 - H_2 - H_3$ in this structure.

Pemon advocate marriage with /wanī-mure/, that is, the child of any woman whom Ego addresses as /wanī/. Technically this can be virtually any woman in the culture of $G + 1$, via the following circumlocution: Ego addresses *unrelated* males and male cross-cousins/brothers-in-law by the same term, /uyese/. The mother of anyone whom Ego addresses as /uyese/ must be in /wanī/ relation to Ego. Thus Ego can justify classifying virtually any woman of his own generation as /wanī-mure/, provided she is not a parallel cousin or sister. Given that there are at present no special terms for female cross-cousin/eligible spouse (or from the female side, for male cross-cousins) (cf. THOMAS, 1971), Ego is confronted with a situation in which the positive injunction is extremely flexible and is underpinned with a negative prohibition on marriage with parallel cousins and sisters. The marriage structure is characterized by this flexible positive rule. In a highly individualistic and egalitarian culture such as the Pemon have, a terrific amount of flexibility is built into the marriage rules themselves.

This flexibility is built around the several meanings of the word /uyese/. In an elementary structure such as the Pemon have, there are no G.O affinal terms. There is however a cross-generational term /uyawopī/, meaning mother-in-law, and a reciprocal term /upayīnu/, meaning son-in-law. These terms are specifically affinal terms, and combined with the flexibility of the /uyese/ term, mean that any given Ego who makes a marriage choice other than the prescribed cross-cousin (usually a first cross-cousin), is readily absorbed into the elementary structure by the substitution of this cross-generational terminology. The term /uyawopī/ is freely substituted for by the term /wanī/, and the /upayīnu/ term is freely substituted for by the terms /upoitolī/ (nephew term, male speaking) and /unwanīpī/ (nephew term, female speaking). Given the flexibility of the reclassification of kin on the basis of spatial proximity and the incorporation of cross-generational affinal terminology into the elementary terminology, the Pemon have an ideal set-up for an indefinite marriage system, one which gives them a structure which is elementary and deterministic at the terminological level yet complex and statistical at the level of practice. The initially matrilineal residence pattern, combined with high mobility of young males in present-day Pemon culture, works hand-in-glove with the flexible marriage rule to insure that, if a marriage partner is not found close at hand, one will be found farther afield.

I suggest that trade relations in Pemon society have an analogous structure. On the level of the rule, the trade partnership is a unitary and

binding relationship, a one-to-one correspondence, and one should trade only with one's trading partner. But other persons get into the act, and on the level of action, many more than just one individual are funneling their goods through a given trade partnership or kinship connection. At the level of action, that is, in terms of the actual on-the-ground relations of trade, a complex system operates in order to fill a variety of peoples' needs for a small number of specified goods, while on the verbal, structural level you have a unitary structure, operating via a one-to-one trade partnership or kinship connection.

There is a kind of ideology of parity which runs through the whole panoply of marriage rules and trade system rules and equivalences. In the realm of marriage, the exchange is always balanced (sister exchange) and it is likewise in the realm of trade, with the binding rules of partnership and equivalences insuring that it is not the individuals involved but the system itself that profits. Rates are relatively fixed in the system, in order that the system maintain itself, at the level of regional ecologies, in the black. The logic of fixed rates in a system which operates via the trade partnership is obvious — you are at peace with your partner, be he Pemon or Makiritare, and the only possible way in which competition can creep in is through the over-extension of hospitality or a pathologically large number of trading trips over a given span of time. In any case, competition is kept out of the price structure in order that the system function smoothly.

At the total system level, capital-intensive shotguns are carried by Pemon middlemen to trade for the labor-intensive graters and canoes of the Makiritare. This is a qualitatively different kind of ecological situation from that of Melanesian trade systems, since no food is being exchanged and neither the Pemon nor the Makiritare have a precarious subsistence base. Pemon are middleman traders and they do have an ecologically poorer situation with respect to their neighbors to the east and west. Nevertheless, it is the political boundary (Brazil-Venezuela) that maintains the Pemon in their middleman position today, and not a set of ecological constraints. The foreshortening of the Makiritare voyaging pattern is also a comparatively recent phenomenon and the present trading configuration could not be imagined without the Pemon access to the diamond mines and the money with which to purchase shotguns. Pemon are taking advantage of their geographical location in this trade, not of their ecological situation. Ecologically they get by slightly less well than their neighbors, but via the trade system they are pulling wealth out of both east and west, internalizing it in items demanded by the Pemon economy.

ABSTRACT

This article describes the operation of an indigenous trade network found in the extreme southeast corner of Venezuela, among the Pemón and their neighbors, all Carib-speaking Amerindian tribes. After a capsule description of Pemón kinship, spheres of exchange are outlined and the trade items which compose the system are delineated. The two principal means of transmitting goods, the trade partnership and kinship ties, are dealt with in detail, and the sources of supply and the various routes over which goods are transported are spelled out. After a detailed description of household patterns of holding goods, descriptions of actual trading journeys are given, and finally the role of the indigenous regional leaders, the capitanes, in facilitating trade is discussed. The article concludes with a suggested parallel between the rules governing trade and the rules governing marriage in Pemón society.

RESUMEN

Este artículo describe el funcionamiento de una red comercial indígena que opera en el ángulo extremo sureste de Venezuela entre los indios Pemón y sus vecinos, todos de filiación lingüística caribe. Después de una breve reseña del sistema de parentesco Pemón, delimitamos las esferas de intercambio y los artículos comerciales que componen el sistema. Analizamos detenidamente las dos modalidades más importantes para la transferencia de bienes: las asociaciones comerciales y los lazos de parentesco. Asimismo detallamos las fuentes de suministro y las diferentes rutas por las cuales se efectúa el transporte de bienes. Después de una descripción detallada del movimiento de los bienes y de algunas expediciones comerciales personalmente acompañadas, discutimos la posición de los capitanes regionales a medida que éstos pueden facilitar el comercio. Concluimos el artículo sugiriendo un paralelismo entre las normas que rigen el comercio y los matrimonios en la sociedad Pemón.

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