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Women as values, signs and power: aspects of the politics of ritual among the Waiwai

John Morton

...civilisation behaves towards sexuality as a people or a stratum of its population does which has subjected another one to its exploitation (Freud 1963: 41).

In *The savage mind* Lévi-Strauss makes it clear that he regards structuralism as a suitable method for laying bare the elemental nature of superstructures (1966: 117). Further on he also makes it clear that he regards superstructures as being reducible to the material world in two related senses, one Marxist, the other psychoanalytic (1966: 253-254). In this paper I wish to explore some possible meeting points between structuralism, Marxism and psychoanalysis. My chief reference point for this exploration will be the position of women in the social organisation of the Waiwai, a group of Carib-speaking Indians of Guiana, and I will attempt to illustrate the close functional interdependence of religion, ritual, ideology and socio-economic practice. My argument falls into two broad divisions. In the first three sections of the paper I trace some key factors which give rise to the high value placed upon women and argue that female initiation is a means by which women are partially subordinated in the society as a result of that high value. In the final two sections I look closely at mythology and ritual exegesis in order to shed some light on the efficacy of ritual as a disciplinary procedure. My general position will be that female initiation serves both to promote and mask certain contradictions in society by creating a moral ambience, functioning as part of an ideology, which allows certain social, economic and political practices to be justified. These practices, I suggest, are in some sense exploitative, although ritual assists in preventing this feature coming to light.

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The ethnographic material used in the analysis is almost exclusively derived from the extraordinarily rich data compiled by the Danish ethnographer, Niels Fock, in his *Waiwai: religion and society of an Amazonian tribe* (1963).¹ In 1954-1955 Fock travelled to Southern Guyana (ex British Guiana) and Northern Brazil to undertake fieldwork with the Waiwai, who at that time were resident in the upper reaches of the Essequibo and Mapuera Rivers. He found them to be fairly typical of Guianese groups. They rely² on slash-and-burn agriculture, with bitter cassava as the staple crop; have a need to supplement their agricultural activities by fishing, hunting and gathering; and have a fairly marked division of labour between the sexes, which corresponds closely to that between hunting, a male preserve, and agriculture and domestic production, mostly undertaken by women. They operate a two-line relationship terminology which prescribes marriage with a bilateral cross cousin; there is a tendency towards ZD marriage; a lack of emphasis on descent, which leaves them best described as cognatic; and a marked tendency towards uxorilocal marriage, something which is tied to the operation of bride service. There is a strong egalitarian ethic among men which manifests itself at both the individual and collective level. Individual villages are autonomous political units and are under the direction of headmen whose power is based on the principle of *primus inter pares*. Attitudes towards women and children tend to be proprietary in nature. There is also a considerable degree of fluidity and mobility involved in social relationships. A rich and detailed cosmology goes hand-in-hand with an exuberant religious life characterized by elaborate myths and ritual procedures, some of which are variations on extremely common themes throughout the Guiana region. Amongst such common themes are the aforementioned female initiation rites and myths describing the actions of the anaconda people, a class of feared, uncanny spiritual beings who live in the rivers. These will constitute a large part of the subject matter of this paper.

Production and reproduction

The Waiwai economy, in common with most in the tropical forest region of South America, operates within a fairly well-defined set of constraints. Subsistence is marked by the typical combination of shifting slash-and-burn agriculture and hunting and gathering, each activity having its effect on the social network through the organisation of task groups necessary for the accomplishment of work and product distribution. In the first section of this paper I wish briefly to discuss the nature of these infrastructural constraints and the relationship which they have to the three different but interconnected types of social aggregation as discerned by Fock -the family group (*eta*), the village community, and the wider and loosely defined cultural-linguistic group or "tribe." Because the main theme of this paper is not social and economic organisation per se, this discussion will be all too brief. However, some comment on the broad outlines of the subsistence economy is

¹ All future references to Fock are to this work.

² For convenience of exposition I am assuming the ethnographic present.

essential to my general argument, since I wish to show how ideology and religion are related to economic, social and political reproduction.

The basic productive cell in Waiwai society is the family unit or household (*eta*), a small group typically consisting of a single married couple, their children (actual, half and adopted), and other unmarried relatives such as brothers, sisters and widowed parents. The basic division in the *eta* is between its male and female heads, the former primarily being responsible for hunting activities and heavier agricultural work and the latter for lighter agricultural tasks and domestic production. Women perform such tasks as planting, weeding and harvesting in the fields and undertake all of the lengthy cassava processing and the cooking of all types of food. Men, while having a very important role to play in agriculture when they clear and burn the fields and assist women in planting and harvesting, have a typical hunter's attitude towards work in the gardens. They identify strongly with the thrill of the hunt in contradistinction to the slow, arduous nature of work in the gardens, and will readily drop the latter in preference for the former. In an ideal sense, then, the *eta*, with its strong focus on the married couple, is characterized by the organic solidarity of the sexes, whereby the wife is strongly identified with agriculture and domesticity and the husband with hunting and adventure. Unmarried brothers, sisters and maturing children are quick to align themselves with this division and soon learn that they have specific sex-linked roles to play in the domestic unit. Some activities do cross this simple division. Men, for instance, indulge in some domestic manufacture by making basketwork, stools and so on. Women, on the other hand, indulge in collecting and fishing, and have even been known to accompany men in the hunt. But such activities are very much subordinate to the main division.

The ecological constraints which operate on these two basic types of subsistence are variable. In relation to agriculture, hunting is marked by considerable unreliability. While it is true that shifting agriculture operates under constraints—garden sites are restricted by the availability of well drained land, and field use leads to rapid and enduring exhaustion of soil fertility (Meggers 1971: 18-23)—these are relatively insignificant given the general size of population which fields have to support. When fields are abandoned after three or four years, people are not normally hard put to locate another suitable site. However, because subsistence levels achieved by slash-and-burn agriculture are not in themselves adequate in providing a sustained, balanced diet, particularly in respect of protein acquisition, hunting and gathering have to be resorted to.

The ethnography does not indicate that the Waiwai are particularly anxious about cassava production, and though they might agree with the Trio aphorism: "We can live without meat; without bread we die" (Rivière, 1969a: 42), they appear to have no special magical techniques to ensure regular agricultural production.³ This contrasts markedly with hunting where there are many such techniques to

³ Such techniques have been reported in Guiana (e.g. Roth 1915: 230), but they do not appear to have the critical character shared by others. A cassava famine has been reported in the region of the Upper Essequibo River (Burt Colson and Morton 1982: 218), but it seems likely to have been caused by epidemics leading to the virtual extermination of the local population.

bring about success in the chase. Meat for the Waiwai is, quite consciously, and to some degree quite objectively, something of a scarce resource. It is not uncommon for men to return from the hunt either empty-handed or with a meagre supply of game, and considerable prestige is won by those hunters who can exhibit consistent success.

This prestige is intimately associated with the village level of social organisation and there appears to be no feminine counterpart which relates to agriculture and domesticity. While it is true that a hard-working, productive female is highly desirable in the eyes of Waiwai men, she does not receive the same degree of collective recognition for her labours. The distinction is important, for while agricultural and domestic production is more tightly bound to the *eta*, each one working its own distinct plot in the gardens, hunting is far more collectively orientated. Fock (1963: 121) was told by one of his informants that the Waiwai recently subscribed to a variation on the "own-kill" rule, whereby it was necessary for hunters not to consume any game which they themselves had killed. But although this rule appears no longer to apply, it is still the case that the hunter is under obligation to share the fruits of his labours with other *eta* which adhere together as a village community, in some cases going so far as to invite members of other villages to come to feast with his co-residents. This emphasis on sharing is, in all likelihood, a corollary to the relative paucity of game which exists in the forest, or, perhaps more realistically, to the generally erratic nature of the hunting quest caused by the differential distribution of game in both time and place (Meggers 1971: 23-25; Lathrap 1970: 35-36; Rivière 1969a: 45; Guppy 1961: 79, 283). The obligation to share is thus an effective means by which the group qua group can ensure for itself an equitable distribution of meat.

From this discussion it is possible to set up a simple dichotomy between agriculture on the one hand, as it is closely tied to self-sufficiency at the *eta* level, and hunting on the other, as it is closely tied to the village. The opposition between the two is by no means straightforward, since the community comes together in such agricultural activities as field clearing and preparing cassava products for feasting, as well as in domestic tasks such as communal house building. Similarly, the Waiwai hunter, on the whole, hunts for his *eta*, not for the community at large, even if he is obliged to share any surplus. However, the main point which I wish to make here is that there are grounds for suggesting that the *eta* and village groups only *necessarily* exist as distinguishable units by virtue of these two modalities of subsistence. Each *eta* is self-sufficient in agricultural production whereas self-sufficiency in hunting operates only at the level of *eta* aggregation.

According to Meggers (1971: 97-120) there is a close relationship between certain key variables in Amazonia which tend to lead to optimum social patterns determined by the forces of production. Her discussion is tendentious, but it does seem likely that hunting in particular plays a key role in limiting village size and density. As I understand the problem, village density and size are primarily limited by the push-and-pull effects of combining agriculture with hunting, because whereas the former requires a certain degree of sedentariness and immobility, the latter requires the exploitation by a band of an effective larger territory which can

maximize game returns. Because of restrictions on effective travel and communication, villages tend not to grow beyond a certain size because the environment will not be able to support further population increase. Under such circumstances, which vary considerably according to location, villages tend to disperse widely and, as a "tribal" unit, play no significant role in the productive sphere.⁴ In the Trio case, Rivière estimates that average population size is about 30 people (1969a: 29). Kaplan states that, in the case of the non-Carib Piaroa, village size is between 16 and 50 inhabitants (1975: 29). The Waiwai figures are comparable. Fock estimates that the total Waiwai population figure is about 180 individuals distributed over 7 villages, the lowest individual figure being 7 and the highest 40 (2-4). Slightly different figures given for the Waiwai by Yde (1965: 15-18) and Evans and Meggers (1964: 201-204) are comparable to Fock's.

Optimum village size therefore varies according to location and historical circumstances, but the Trio figure of 30 individuals seems to be a reliable guide to the limits beyond which a village tends not to grow. When populations increase above this level, sorcery accusations begin to proliferate and factions appear which often lead to fissioning and a redistribution of the population.⁵ But if productive forces tend to fix village populations at a certain level, the ability of the aggregate productive cell to reproduce itself becomes problematic. It has been estimated that something like a population of 500 is necessary if a human group is to reproduce itself effectively over time (Washburn and Lancaster 1968: 302), and whatever the reliability of this figure, it is clear that the normal size of Waiwai villages falls way below that which is required for effective long term reproduction of the cell. Because of the low level of population, the productive unit shows a continuous tendency to find itself in demographic difficulties due to barrenness, inadequate sex ratios, high mortality figures and other demographic vagaries. In order for this situation to be rectified, it is necessary for the population to become mobile within the larger network of villages so that long-run statistical laws can operate to full effect.

The phenomenon of village agglomeration and alliance seems to have a close connection with this reproductive problem because the interdependence of villages is closely tied to the realignment of population through marriage, adoption, political asylum and so on (Kaplan 1975: passim; Rivière 1969a: passim). The Waiwai themselves are acutely aware of this problem of biological reproduction. Fock's data on *eta* composition (1963: 197-198) shows that adoption is extremely common. Similarly, they have an institution, known as *anton*, which allows elder children of working age to assist *eta* to which they do not belong, something which Fock perceptively links with the unequal distribution of children among different families. "The *anton* custom seems to be an effective means of counteracting the haphazard division of large and small families and of equalizing the consequent differences in economic and practical services" (1963: 154). *Anton* ties may easily merge into adoption. In addition to this, the Waiwai show a marked anxiety about

⁴ This ignores the important question of trade, which, for the sake of brevity, I do not discuss here.

⁵ The sociological dimensions of this problem are briefly discussed by Rivière (this symposium).

sickness and ill-health, shamanic curing being a well developed institution. This anxiety is also particularly linked to infant mortality, which is high, through the couvade. To couvade a child means to prevent him from falling sick and dying. Altogether, it is not uncommon for *eta* at any particular time to find themselves with a string of same-sex births, no births at all, or a lack of actual or potential workers due to sickness and death. In any case, the reproductive (and therefore productive) capacities of the *eta* and the village may be threatened. *Eta* within the village may distribute their children around and people who have lost their providers may attach themselves to other *eta*, but the restricted size of the village is still such that it is likely to have to recruit from outside. Communication within the wider, dispersed group of villages exists primarily to this end.⁶

Given Waiwai subsistence levels, the threefold division of social organisation into *eta*, village and "tribe" makes sense in terms of the three imperatives necessary for production, and an ideal correlation can be discerned between agriculture, hunting and human reproduction on the one hand, and families, villages and the wider group on the other. In this situation, hunting seems to play a pivotal role because it both separates and unites. Households cohere in order to take advantage of collective hunting and villages disperse because of constraints on the size of an effectively exploitable territory. No doubt the situation is more complicated than this and the division almost certainly has some rough edges. For instance, Rivière (1969a: 56-57) has argued that the productive cell among the Trio may be constituted by the agglomeration of villages, though given the lack of hard evidence it is difficult to assess the necessity of the wider group in the economic sphere. However, my main point is that at each level of social organisation there is a very strong emphasis on one particular set of infrastructural constraints. One might expect them to overlap somewhat, but the degree to which this occurs through necessity is probably quite limited.

Social relations and the relative values of men and women

According to Meillassoux (1981: 25-30) the general character of social relations in societies which combine slash-and-burn agriculture with hunting is not altogether arbitrary and can be accounted for in terms of the infrastructural constraints outlined above. Of particular interest are his pronouncements on the overriding significance of women in the domestic community, something which he essentially reduces to the key problem of human reproduction. For if the main concerns in Waiwai subsistence are cassava production, the acquisition of meat, and the acquisition of healthy young people to provide continuity for the productive cell, it is clear that the long-run scarcity of these "products" is graded. Cassava is relatively plentiful and can generally be produced under long-run stable conditions. Meat is more scarce, but it can normally be provided in sufficient quantities given a certain level of household co-operation. People, on the other hand, particularly

⁶ For comment on the general importance of the shortage of human resources in Guiana, the reader is again referred to Rivière (this symposium).

children, are the scarcest "product" of all because of the constraints set on community size by the productive sphere per se. In such a situation women, as child-bearers, become objects of intense value.

In contrast to pure hunter-gatherer societies, where group adhesion is extremely flexible (Meillassoux 1981: 14-19), societies which combine hunting and gathering with shifting agriculture tend to be slightly more stable due to the movement away from an economy of immediate return. Although residence is still fluid, a slow rhythm of agricultural production, characterized by continuity, succession of work, a delay in return on labour investment, and a long, arduous type of product manufacture, means that productive cells tend to remain more stable. But because of the inadequacy of a pure cassava diet, as applies in the Waiwai situation, part of the community still has to invest its labour in hunting and gathering. With the Waiwai, as with others, this has resulted in a fairly marked division of labour between the sexes. The women are more or less fixed in the domestic sphere, while the men engage themselves in the mobile occupation of hunting. Again according to Meillassoux, this division of labour is not arbitrary. It stems from the higher value of women in the realm of biological reproduction.

Female fertility is more valuable than that of males because of the severe constraints set on female reproduction through pregnancy and post-partum nurturing. The number of children that a woman can produce in her lifetime is severely circumscribed, whereas a man's capacity to inseminate is almost unlimited. Women are thus more precious than men and this difference assumes key social importance when the forces of production are such that productive cells are severely limited in their capacity to reproduce. In such circumstances there is a tendency for the group to keep its women while allowing men to circulate. This is not, of course, to say that men are not valuable, since they still have a fundamental role to play in the community's work. Nevertheless, when productive and reproductive capacities are combined, the value of a woman outweighs that of a man, with the result that it is safer for the group to negotiate the circulation of males rather than females. A tendency for uxori-local marriage and "gynecostatism" comes about as the result of groups holding on to their women and letting go of some of their men, the loss of whom is less critical. Communities which face grave dangers of dying out by having their numbers reduced to an unproductive level tend to place a higher value on their women and do everything possible to keep them. Such is the case with the Waiwai as with most Guianese groups.

When women are kept, uxori-locality becomes the norm, but there is always a danger that productive cells will fall short of the number of females needed for effective reproduction. Thus the group will be forced to recruit from outside, something which contradicts the established norm. Women then become objects of competition. Communities which find themselves with a deficit adapt their hunting capabilities and treat women as prey, so that the main motivating force of warfare becomes woman capture, something which Chagnon (1977: 123-124; 1979: 87) has documented so well for the Yanomamö and which has been a general feature of political life in Guiana. (See also Lizot 1977a: 515; 1978: 108.) Herein, suggests Meillassoux, lies the rationale for the subjection of women and their

immobilization in the inferior domestic realm.

Abduction encapsulates all the elements of the enterprise of the inferiorisation of women and anticipates all the others. Groups of armed men... attempt to capture a woman by surprise, preferably one who is isolated, unarmed, unprepared and unwarned. Whatever her physical strength or intelligence, she is from the beginning doomed to defeat. Her safety lies not in resisting but in immediate *submission* to her captors. Her protection does not depend on herself but on other members of her group, moreover on the men than the women. This dependence on men as fighters does not arise because they are naturally more fitted but because they are relatively useless as reproducers. Men are expendable and less coveted. Thus women are thrown into a situation of dependence as much in relation to the men of their own group who protect them as to men of other groups who abduct them in order to protect them in their turn. Made inferior because of their *social* vulnerability, women are put to work under male protection and are given the least rewarding, the most tedious and, above all, the least gratifying tasks such as agriculture and cooking. From the outset excluded from war or hunting activities on which the society's values are built, women are devalued to such an extent that female infanticide is sometimes practised more frequently than male, in spite of their essential gift of childbearing (Meillassoux 1981: 28-29, original emphases).

I have quoted Meillassoux at length here and paraphrased part of his general argument because I believe he has indicated some extremely important features of Amerindian attitudes towards women. His general thesis on the role of women in what he calls "domestic communities" is much broader than I have been able to illustrate here, and is, in fact, fraught with problems that can only be solved by more careful ethnographic and historical research. It is beyond my brief to discuss these problems here,⁷ but in the following pages I will attempt to adapt some of Meillassoux's less contentious insights for my own special purposes. For while his general thesis does present problems, it also opens up some very fruitful lines of enquiry which have hitherto been somewhat neglected.

Although woman (and child) capture are, and have been, of great importance in Guiana, the Waiwai themselves have not been described as a particularly warlike people and they share a concern for peace and tranquility with other groups in Guiana such as the Piaroa (Overing Kaplan 1975: *passim*). However, while the situation of chronic raiding among some of the Yanomamö may in many ways be unique, the theme of warfare still punctuates the activities of most groups in Guiana. Contrary to what Meggers states (1971: 96), the Waiwai *do* have a strong tradition of warfare. Historical research by Fock (1963: 5-9) has shown that Waiwai groups have often been involved in raiding, and as recently as 1949 one Waiwai group prepared its defences against a suspected impending raid by the Mouyenna (Jones 1951: 3). It is quite likely that these raids were connected with woman theft, since it is well documented that Waiwai groups have been constantly faced with a problem with respect to a supply of women (Guppy 1961: 116; Peberdy 1948: 16; Yde 1965: 18; Fock 1963: 134), a problem which has been exacerbated by general infertility caused by malaria (Jones 1951: 2; 1955: 3). While it may be true that the

⁷ One of the major problems with Meillassoux's thesis, as has been noted by Rivière (1982a; 1982b), is that it seems to apply best to certain virilocal and "gynecomobile" societies in South America. Meillassoux also seems to think that marriage-by-capture is entirely absent from hunter-gatherer societies, even though it used to be a general feature of Australian Aboriginal social life before contact.

Waiwai have not for some time indulged in such raids, they are acutely conscious of their potential presence and their link with the scarcity of women and children. Furthermore, in respect of Meillassoux's thesis on the link between the value of women as procreators and their restriction to the domestic sphere, a number of Waiwai customs stress the logic of the association. Women, especially menstruating ones, are thought to threaten the hunting prowess of men and dogs. Similarly, while women do not normally accompany men in the hunt, an exception may be made if the woman is childless. Again, while women do not normally indulge in much communication between villages unless accompanied by men, older, menopausal women are allowed far more freedom of movement. Indeed, such older women may achieve quite high prestige.

Warfare leading to abduction and a strict rule of uxorilocal marriage are polar types of strategy which facilitate the necessary movements of population between productive cells seeking to reproduce themselves. But between these two extremes a number of intermediate strategies is possible according to historical circumstances. Overing Kaplan (1975: 88-123) and Rivière (1969a: 104-140) have shown that the Piaroa and Trio respectively do not apply any simple, straightforward rule of post-marital residence. In both cases uxorilocality is the statistical norm, but although a husband is expected to undertake bride service for his father-in-law or some other senior male affine, the degree to which this rule is followed varies greatly. Such affinal links may last for as short a period as six months or as long as many years. Similarly, the affinal links may be broken in a spirit of enmity or cemented in a spirit of friendship. The Waiwai exhibit the same flexibility.

In general among the Waiwai matrilocality, and its consequent bride service, is not permanent, though it lasts at all events one year. This corresponds roughly to the time it takes for the married couple to obtain the first crop from their field—until then they are economically dependent upon the wife's family—and for the first child's birth, where the woman's mother plays a big part. The first year of matrilocality must presumably be regarded as advantageous to the married couple (Fock 1963: 135).

However, elsewhere Fock describes uxorilocal residence as "unqualified" (1963: 134), going on to say: "To serve *washma* (bride service) means to let one's sister's [daughter's] husband undertake some work for one. *Washma* work, which the brother-in-law [son-in-law] is bound to perform, must actually be regarded as bride service, *in theory valid for life* but actually only as long as matrilocality persists" (1963: 201, my emphasis).

The question of how long an inferior wife receiver is bound to work for his affines is clarified by Fock in his discussion of the ceremonial dialogue which normally precedes a marriage, for here the contractual nature of marriage and its elements of competition become explicit. Ceremonial dialogue in marriage is:

... a tug-of-war regarding prestige and economy... where the girl's father attempts to belittle his daughter in the suitor's eyes in order to force him to declare a still greater interest.⁸ During the chant the bride's

⁸ Fock (1963: 217) refers to this as a "psychological sales technique."

father [brother] will quote a price which may be one of the long bows, a pegall, cassava sieve or, most often, a hammock. As a rule the suitor's spokesman [generally a senior male kinsman] agrees, though several cases were observed where no bride fee was paid (Fock 1963: 135).

But if bride price is a weak institution, bride service is certainly stronger.

The course of the *oho* chant [ceremonial dialogue] is of very great importance to those implicated. The status of the young man in regard to his in-laws' family will partly be decided here, for the girl's father during the course of the chant will demand that the young man settles down with him... and he can force through a binding assent to this, if the suitor's father must use persuasion to bring about the union. If on the other hand the girl's father willingly renounces his daughter the young man can escape with a lesser price for the bride and, more important, can refuse to dwell with his father-in-law... Bride service... is only effective if the custom of matrilocality be maintained... According to this, it is a man's duty to obey the male relatives of his wife, particularly the father and brothers, when they demand assistance, as for example, in field work or house building [and hunting]. It is not surprising that attempts are made to avoid this dependency (1963: 135).

Marriage arrangements are thus marked by a strong competitive element and ceremonial dialogue is a method of conflict resolution without resort to arms (although such dialogues have been known to end in violence). The degree to which such conflicts are "hard" or "soft," to use indigenous metaphors, seems to be a factor of social distance, which is closely tied to physical distance. On the whole, the greater the social distance, the harder the speech and bargaining, and the more likely are the latter to break down (Rivière 1969a: 235-238). It seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that the relative intensity of ceremonial dialogue is closely tied to the well documented tension between endogamy and exogamy in Guiana (Overing Kaplan 1975: passim; Rivière 1969a: passim).

Elsewhere (Morton 1979: 26-70) I have made an analysis of Waiwai social organisation using Fock's general material (1963: 185-242) and genealogies collected by Evans and Meggers (1964). My conclusions tally well with those made for the Trio and the Piaroa by Rivière and Kaplan respectively. That is to say, Waiwai kinship and marriage are characterized by a certain tension born of the contradiction between the desire for village endogamy and the necessity for village exogamy. I will not discuss this matter at length here, but it is important to note that I understand this tension to be born of the same contradiction which Meillassoux sees as being the *primum mobile* of warfare in societies which mix agriculture with hunting and gathering. Productive cells basically seek to reproduce themselves within their own confines, but demographic pressures are such that this is only possible under given short-run circumstances.

When Fock states that attempts are often made to side-step the dependency demanded by bride service, he is alluding to the strong ethic of independence which exists among Waiwai men. Marriage, in a sense, represents a threat to this independence because of the reliance that a man has on his in-laws, initially because he lives off the produce of their field until his own is established, but also because he is obliged to work and hunt for his male affines on demand. However, the degree to which these situations become critical is highly variable. Prior to marriage a man is already dependent on his kinsmen's *eta*, and no matter whether a man is single or

married, he is still under obligation to hunt and share his catch in the *eta* and the village. The key problem thus becomes one of whether or not his marriage involves a high degree of social dislocation, something which is far less likely when the marriage is endogamous. Moving from *eta* to *eta* involves no more than entering into a closer relationship with people with whom the groom is already familiar. However, moving from village to village is likely to involve considerable upheaval and is typically tinged with suspicion and mistrust, not least of all because the groom's affines will be concerned about their kinswoman's husband's ties to another village. If bride service obligations are broken, it is possible that the young groom will take his wife back to his natal home, an event which would be the equivalent of a "peaceful raid."

Furthermore, endogamy is important in terms of the infrastructural constraints outlined previously. While it is true that the higher value of a woman leads to uxorilocality, groups do not, for all that, readily lose the services of their men, who are critically important as providers of a relatively scarce resource —meat. Without going into the matter in detail, it can be seen that endogamy operates as an ideal solution to reproduction because it has the potential for being the least risky and most economical solution to the problem of production. If possible, men will even try to arrange marriages for their sons which are virilocal. The productive cell, by keeping both its men and women, attempts to maximize its human resources to both productive and reproductive ends, even if this means partially flouting the rules of incest prohibition which are designed to enhance population mobility and continued reproductivity (Meillassoux 1981: 8-22). The common Guianese practice of ZD marriage, as well as the rarer FZ marriage, have both been reported for the Waiwai, and they are likely to have been strategic manoeuvres to augment the degree of village endogamy. As several Guianese groups are aware, such practices are dangerously close to being incestuous, something which led Thomas to conclude for the Pemon that: "... there is a rather loose definition of exogamy... which parallels an ill-defined incest taboo, and which has as its expression the ZD union, representing a gray area between what is and is not permitted" (1973: 161).⁹ However, even allowing for this tendency towards endogamy and quasi-incestuous marriage, stricter rules of incest prohibition combine with demographic pressures over time never to allow productive cells to "freeze." And when population mobility is required in marriage, there is a very marked tendency for the more valuable women to be kept in the first instance, while the less valuable men may be allowed to move. The key aspects of inter-village mobility, on one level at least, become those of immobilizing women and attracting men from outside. But negotiation and bargaining may give way to raiding and force when demographic

⁹ As will become clear below, this problem of incestuous marriage is of some importance. Thomas (1973: 152-163; 1982: 108-110) shows how the Pemon are equivocal about the moral correctness of ZD unions. They are particularly concerned with the immorality of marriage with an actual ZD, though it does occur infrequently. The Oyampi (Campbell and Rivière 1978: 30, 37) show a similar ambivalence, though no actual ZD marriages have been recorded. The Trio (Rivière 1969a: 73) seem to be concerned about marriage with a yZD. Similar views about incorrect marriages are implicit in Henley's discussion of Panare kinship (1982: 87-123).

pressures become acute.

Village social structure reflects this pattern. Contrary to what is said by Evans and Meggers (1964: 207), the Waiwai are *not* matrilineal. Recruitment to groups is very fluid over time and is probably best thought of as cognatic. Questions of descent are further complicated by the practice of contracting brother and sister relationships with unrelated co-residents (Fock 1963: 136-137, 194-195), something which seems to act as a way of giving the community the stamp of kinship through fictive kin ties (see Morton 1979: 39-49). Nevertheless, the requirement of temporary uxorilocality does tend to give the Waiwai village a certain matrilineal character, something which is vouchsafed by the set of age terms which people apply in the community. These terms simultaneously reflect the importance of uxorilocality and its link with female reproductivity.

Young children of either sex are generally referred to as *okopuchi*, a term which translates literally as "little corpse," an idea which is tied to others about the weakness of children and how they are prone to get sick and die. These beliefs, objectively based, but finding expression in ideas about spirituality, are the basis of the Waiwai *couvade* (Fock 1963: 139-151; cf. Rivière 1974b). From puberty onwards males and females receive different appellations. From the time of a girl's first menstruation until her marriage, she is known as *emasi*. Such girls are expected to work extremely hard and, after initiation, are expected to exhibit the virtues which make them attractive as wives. During initiation the girl is given a stern moral lecture on the qualities of honesty, diligence, obedience, willingness and industry, for these are the characteristics which are deemed suitable for the female role in life and which a Waiwai man finds attractive. As soon as a girl is married her designation is changed to *emato* and she keeps this until the birth of her first child.¹⁰ After this all-important event a woman becomes *ewshanyon* (literally "child mother") and Fock says:

This is her actual period of activity as head of an independent *eta*. Her economical responsibility is considerable, since the basis of the Waiwai community, agriculture, depends upon her. An *ewshanyon* is almost continuously active, and in the household she must attend to various single relatives in addition to her husband (1963: 160).

If a woman proves to be barren she keeps her *emato* designation, but women who do prove to be fertile, only to give birth to weak, sickly children who soon die, are given the sinister name of *okohyon*, which literally translates as "mother of death." Older women in the community are generally called *chacha*, which is the vocative kin term for grandmother and mother-in-law. At this stage of women's lives their activities steadily decline until they become entirely dependent on gifts of food from relatives and co-villagers.

¹⁰ This is slightly different from what Fock says. He states that the *emato* designation simply applies after the two year *emasi* period. However, given the shortage of women, *emasi* girls are almost inevitably married by the time they become *emato*. There are no able-bodied spinsters or young widows in Waiwai society, but there are able-bodied bachelors and widowers. For descriptions of the pathetic nature of South American bachelors see Lévi-Strauss (1969: 39; 1971: 341). Waiwai headmen and shamans lose much of their power if they lose a wife.

Men have a corresponding set of age terms, except that the second covers only the time between marriage and old age. From maturity a man is referred to as *karipamchan* and this is the time when he is expected to acquire and exhibit skills and strengths appropriate to his roles as hunter and field worker. From marriage to old age men are called *etutekasba* or *piti*, the latter being the vocative kin term for son-in-law which is extended to cover all the young men of the village as a group. Fock states that: "It is this class that executes all the heavier manual labour connected with clearing of fields, long hunting expeditions and so forth. This group will consist mainly of men who, because of the *washma* custom..., are obligated to work" (1963: 161). Older men are generally called *pacho* or *paritomo*, the direct and indirect kin terms respectively for grandfather. These men are not obliged to engage in heavy work and settle instead for quieter occupations such as fishing and basketry. Like older women, they rely heavily on younger relatives and co-villagers for their food, some of this being obtained from *piti*.

Fock does not go into detail about how these terms are used, but I suspect that they are in part strategic resources on which to call under given social circumstances. Calling the younger married men of the village *piti*, for instance, may well be particularly operative when a headman exhorts them to undertake communal work. Headmen themselves are often called *apa* (father) quite irrespective of relationship to the addressor, and this is simply a reflection of seniority. It may well be that such terms are comparable to the way in which such groups as the Piaroa (Overing Kaplan 1975) and the Kalapalo (Basso 1970) use certain types of terminological devices to stress either kinship or affinity according to what is deemed appropriate to the circumstances. But whatever the truth of this hypothesis, the above set of age terms shows clearly how marriage shapes the Waiwai's overall view of their social universe. In one ideal sense, older men are related to mature men as affines and to mature women as kinsmen, so reflecting the key significance of uxorilocality. Within the kin/affine distinction, *emasi*, *emato* and *ewshanyon* are agricultural labourers, domestics and mothers (actual or potential); *piti* are field workers and hunters.

When women are in short supply it is their reproductive rather than their productive potential which is of prime significance. Agricultural activity is such that relatively few producers can provide for a relatively large number of consumers, though, of course, within limits. Nevertheless, when Fock enquired as to motives for marriage among Waiwai men he was given the following in order of importance: "1) 'to obtain someone who can work for our food,' 2) to have children, and 3) attraction to a woman. The third reason was seldom advanced, presumably because virtues like industry and ability largely represent what a Waiwai finds attractive" (1963: 135). This order of preference comes about largely because of the incest taboo. A man can stay economically reliant on the *eta* of his immediate kin, but only so long as he does not marry. If he wants to have children, then he must forsake the *eta* of his kinsmen in order to legitimise them. In the short run, this means a period of dependence on his wife's *eta*, though later he and his wife will have their own. Thus the concern for having a domestic worker and the concern for having children are two sides of the same coin, and female fertility and productivity

become inextricably entwined.

It is well enough known that in Guiana power is to a large degree dependent on the manipulation of relationships with affines, the best documented case being that of the Piaroa (Overing Kaplan 1975). Indeed, being able to dispose over a number of inferior affines (as well as junior kinsmen) is one of the most important ways in which leadership is created and sustained in these egalitarian societies. The Waiwai are no exception to this pattern and it therefore follows that women are extremely important in the political process. As well as being inferior themselves, women become the means of making men inferior. Thus political matters are also dependent on swidden agriculture, hunting and gathering as the means of material subsistence, since it is the fixing of women in the domestic realm, and in their natal homes, which also leads to the dependence of the inferior affine on the *eta* of a wife giver. Female initiation, the ritual which in some sense creates a woman, has a key role to play in this.

Female initiation

When a girl first menstruates she informs the female head of her *eta* who tells her to sit down immediately. The girl is not allowed to touch anything other than a basketwork tray, which she has to place over her head so that she cannot see the sky. The mother then cuts the girl's hair with the jaw of a piranha fish, the only instrument deemed suitable for the purpose, and removes all of her adornments. In the meantime, the girl's father or some other male relative will have built a *wayapa* (seclusion hut = "the walls"), either inside the large communal house or as a separate structure in the village place. The *wayapa* occupies a small area and has no recognizable entrances or exits. It is built from the leaves of the lu palm or pimpler palm, other kinds of palm such as the dalibanna, manicole and wild banana,¹¹ some of which are normally used as thatch, being strictly proscribed.

After the girl has entered the *wayapa* by pushing aside the leaves, she must only leave in order to relieve herself, and then be careful always to take her tray with her. A girl is allowed to be seen on such occasions, so long as it is not by a shaman, a person who has to avoid all possible contact with a female initiand or any woman who is menstruating. Shamans abhor the presence of vaginal blood and will not do so much as walk in the footsteps of a menstruating woman. Although the girl may see other people from time to time she is rarely allowed to speak to them, and even if she does, she may only mumble faintly or whisper. Most of her time is spent spinning cotton, the only task which she is allowed to perform, and the only artefacts which accompany her in the seclusion period are a spindle, a piece of cane with which to beat the cotton, a knife, a clay vessel and the aforementioned tray. She does have a hammock to sleep in, but by day she must sit on an old, light, white tree trunk and let her blood flow into the ground. Her diet is severely restricted. She may eat tapioca-free cassava bread, a drink made from pure cassava flour and water, a

¹¹ For all identifications of plant and animal species, the reader is referred to Fock (1963), Yde (1965) and Guppy (1961).

little fruit of the lu palm, and *kutmo*, a collective term for very small fish. All meat, most fruits, and many cassava products are strictly tabooed.

When two months have passed the girl's mother comes to the hut with a long bow and, passing it through the thatch, tugs the girl quickly and violently through the *wayapa*. The girl is given a small gourd to place firmly between her legs and undergoes an "ant-belt ordeal," whereby a plaited frame containing biting ants is tied to her body. At some stage the girl will have handed the cotton which she has spun to her father or brother so that it can be burned. Lacerations are made on her body and the cotton ash is rubbed into the bloody wounds.¹² There then follows the moral lecture by her mother, which Fock refers to as instruction in six basic rules.

1) To refrain for some time from eating meat and drinking tapioca. 2) Never to answer angrily or pertly an elder relative when asked to perform service. 3) If an elder relative says: "Go and fetch water" you must answer "*obo*" or "*ta*" (very well). 4) Never to be lazy. 5) To rise up quickly when asked to perform a service. 6) Never to steal cotton or anything else from her sisters, "for if you do they will blow magic on you and you will die". Willingness, industry and obedience are thus the virtues of an *emasi*, that is, of a coming wife (1963: 157).

After this teaching the girl can again begin to wear her body decorations, although feather adornments are banned for a further period. The girl is also given for the first time her arm-bands made of white bead strings. Adolescent boys also wear these bands. About one month is supposed to pass before the girl has sexual relations with anybody, but she is said not to marry for two years. This two year *emasi* period sees the girl under a number of prologed restrictions. An *emasi* must refrain from walking customary paths and always wear something around her feet so that a shaman will not walk in her footsteps. In addition, she must not eat either tapir or peccary meat. As the girl matures into marriageable age, the harshness of these restrictions gradually falls away until they are dropped.

There is very good evidence here in support of Meillassoux's claim that the fear of abduction leads to women's inferiority and immobilization in the domestic sphere, and this emerges more clearly when one looks at the exegesis which was given about the ritual to Fock. The Waiwai subscribe to a general belief in the cosmic power of initiation. A girl cannot look at the sky because it would cave in and crush the earth. Should she only catch a glimpse of the heavens it is reckoned that a heavy rainstorm would be the result. There is a more general justification for this prohibition because it is said that should girls not undergo initiation at all, the result would be persistent heavy rains accompanied by thunder, lightning and rising, flooding rivers. In a myth about an *emasi* girl (Fock 1963: 48-53), which seems to act as a charter for the ritual, an initiand looks at the river after being expressly forbidden to do so. The outcome of this rash behaviour was that the river rose up through a hole in the ground to destroy almost totally the village and gardens.

The Waiwai explain flooding by saying that the anaconda people spit a great

¹² These ethnographic details on body lacerations and burned cotton are not mentioned in Fock or any other source on the Waiwai. I am extremely grateful to George Mentore for personally communicating this information (see footnote 28).

deal, and this class of spiritual beings, comprising water boas, large fish and some other water creatures, is thought to be particularly attracted to girls during their *emasi* period through the smell of their menstrual blood. Indeed, there is an overarching rationale for *emasi* rituals, which is that seclusion is designed to protect girls from the ravages of the loathed and feared anaconda people, who would raid and carry them off were it not for the disguising of their menstrual smell. Fock (1963: 158) says that an informant gave him an account of a group of Waiwai who neglected to initiate their young women because they denied the existence of the anaconda people. But when the girls one day went to the river to bathe, a group of anaconda people rose up from the river and abducted them. It is said that these mythical creatures only ever show themselves to women, except on those occasions when they are contacted by shamans. In the aforementioned myth about initiation, the events which immediately preceded the flooding of the village and gardens concern the activities of some anaconda people who emerged from the river on which the girl had cast her eyes. They followed her back to her village, danced and sang in the plaza,¹³ and tried unsuccessfully to abduct her.

I will return to the subject of the anaconda people in the next two sections, but it should be noted that a major feature of their attraction to women is their lust for menstrual blood. Many other specific prohibitions are justified in related terms because they are designed to protect and maintain a girl's procreative powers. The leaves of the manicole palm are not used as a thatch for the *wayapa* because the spirit of that tree would come every night to have intercourse with the girl. These liaisons are said to take place in the girl's dreams, which, like those of shamans, are regarded as actual experiences with the outside world. During the seclusion period the girl is forbidden to touch gourds, other than the one which she is given directly after coming out, because they are said to cause prolapse. Curiously enough, the special gourd which she *is* given is said to have the opposite effect: it keeps her cervix in place.¹⁴ The meat of the toucan and collared peccary is also banned because it causes the cervix to sink, and this applies to the prohibitions on many fruits and vegetables. Toucan feather decorations also cause cervical motion. Altogether, these reasons for initiation form a set stressing the protection of a girl's sexuality.

But if a woman's sexuality is an important aspect of her attractiveness, as well as having material importance, so also is her industry, and another set of prohibitions is designed to make a girl hard-working and strong. Quite apart from the moral lecture given by her mother, which is designed to inculcate ideas about industry and compliance, the girl is said to have her hair cut and personal adornments removed because they are seats of laziness.¹⁵ I also suspect that the

¹³ The dancing refers to an inter-village dance festival held by the Waiwai - the *shodewika*. I will have cause to mention this festival again towards the end of the paper.

¹⁴ Fock gives no details on the special character of this gourd, but the matter may be of some interest to those wishing to follow up the "concrete logic" of the situation. Gourds are of the same family as pumpkins, and quite apart from pumpkins having close associations with women in our own mythology (e.g. Cinderella and witches at Halloween), they are also connected with body smells, menstruation and femininity in some African societies (Loudon 1977: 166 and 176).

¹⁵ This contrasts with men's decorations, which, being largely acquired through hunting (they are

rubbing of cotton ash into her body is justified in these terms, because men undergo similar ordeals designed to give them strength in the hunt. A further set of bans is justified in terms of homoeopathic cause-effect relations. If the girl sits on heavy, hard wood she is said to become lazy and slow, and the meat of the three-toed sloth and tortoise causes a girl to become melancholy. Also, the "ant-belt ordeal" to which the girl is subjected is supposed to make her strong and energetic in her post-seclusion period. Similar cause-effect relations are used to justify initiation by avoiding the spoiling of a girl's general attractiveness, so suggesting that Fock was not completely correct in assuming that women's beauty can simply be reduced to industry and ability. The maam bird causes sores on the scalp, as it has itself. Spider monkey and the powis bird bring about red pimples all over the body. Howler monkey and marmoset are said to cause extensive body sores. The tiger fish induces a rash and the paku fish makes a girl's stomach swell. The sakiwinki monkey darkens a girl's face colouring and tapir, forest deer and tortoise cause inordinate flatulence. The tortoise, in addition, causes hollows in the skin. The haimara fish causes flaccid thighs on account of its flexible tail, the alligator warts on the behind, and the marudi bird a red posterior. Finally, agouti and labba give rise to sandflies in the feet.¹⁶

Without for the moment going into details about the symbolism used in female initiation, it is clear that Meillassoux's remarks on the historical priority of woman theft as the cause of female inferiority and restriction to the domestic realm have particular relevance to the *emasi* ritual. *It is a form of symbolic violence from within justified in terms of potential violence from without, thus giving the former the surface character of a caring relationship.* Quite apart from the fact that the anaconda people are thought of as raiders and abductors, the whole of the procedure emphasizes and hyperbolizes the idea of immobility. For an *emasi* girl, almost everything in nature is a profound threat to her well-being. As a result she is thrown under the protection of her elders, most notably of her father or brother who builds her *wayapa* and has detailed knowledge of the anaconda people and other outside threats, and her mother, an experienced woman who has already successfully avoided all of the dangers. The very keynote of *emasi* seclusion is continence —lack of visual, oral and sexual contact with the outside world— which stresses the idea that women should not in any way be contaminated by nature. As a result, the girl becomes strong, remains sexually intact, and is submissive to the demands of those who have initiated her. Her relatives, for their part, have also

made of feathers, bones, etc.), are symbols of the strength and prowess of the hunter (George Mentore: personal communication). Rivière (1969b: 162) interprets Waiwai men's treatment of the hair, when it is bound tightly and inserted into a tube, as symbolizing continence, hardness and strength.

¹⁶ A further aspect of ritual exegesis is not discussed here. Peccary meat is said to be banned because the father of the peccaries, a spiritual being said to control the number and frequency of peccary herds in the district, would abduct the girl and take her to his mountain home. Apart from anacondas, he is the only being who threatens the girl in this way. He is said to hate the smell of menstrual blood and the sight of red paint. When he is angered by either of them, he withdraws his herds and refuses to allow them to be hunted. This symbolism is complicated and shows some different points of emphasis from other threats to *emasi*. It is linked to shamanism and is not directly relevant to the themes of this paper. However, its special character can be accounted for (see Morton 1979: 252-276).

guaranteed the industry of a working daughter (sister) and the requisite attractiveness necessary to persuade or cajole a junior male affine to come and work bride service. But on one level at least, female initiation brings about an awareness of the possibility of marriage-by-capture and, as a result, is in correspondence with a latent reality. However, it is patently obvious that it achieves much more than that.

Menstruation, incest and the anaconda people

The fear which is instilled into a girl undergoing initiation is not simply of marriage-by-capture. Initiation does not only teach the idea that should a girl's movements not be restricted she will be carried off by raiders. Neither does it suggest at all that she will be carried off to procreate and work in another village. Instead, it teaches that as a result of coming into contact with the outside world, she will become slow, lazy, hideously ugly and sexually impaired. Similarly, while the sexuality of the anaconda people corresponds fairly well to the true motive of raiding, it is deemed to be perverse and potentially cataclysmic. Not only is there the threat of community destruction by flood, but there also seems to be the idea that the anaconda people seek to make women sick and kill them. Kloos (1971: 95) reports that the Maroni River Caribs believe that anacondas are offended by the smell of menstrual blood, and should they detect it they would kill or incapacitate the woman responsible. As for the Waiwai, Fock (1963: 130) says that some shamans are in contact with a subsection of the anaconda people whom they can call upon to kill women, and while it is not certain whether they are said to achieve this through sexual intercourse, the theme of snakes entering the vaginas of women is so common in Guiana (Roth 1915: passim) that such activity is not likely to be far from the minds of Waiwai girls. The reason why girls are subjected to all of these threats is complicated, but a clue can be found in a single inversion which it is possible to trace from the material already presented in this paper. During the *emasi* period all dangers from the outside world are said to threaten the initiand. But when menstruation occurs after the initiation period, it is the outside world itself (game and the skill of the hunter) which is said to be threatened. In this section the ideological significance of this inversion should become apparent.

Those familiar with the general outline of conception theory in the tropical forest region of South America, which views the male as the progenitor of the child and the female as its mere place of growth (Huxley 1956: 148-149; Kloos 1971: 99; Butt Colson 1975: 304; Basso 1970: 405; Karsten 1968: 422-423); something which often finds expression in mythology (Roth 1915: 322-323; Huxley 1956: 149-151), would not be surprised by the idea that Waiwai men symbolically appropriate the reproductive capacities of women. This idea seems to be crucially important for female initiation, for while an *emasi* girl is protected because she is thought to be weak, many of the restrictions being designed to enhance her strength and beauty, the main theme of the ritual appears to be the enhancement of women's sexual powers. Not only does the ritual have this explicit rationale, because it guards against prolapse, but the lustful and dangerous character of the anaconda people is the key justification to which all others are subordinate. It follows, then, that the

anaconda people play a dominant role in this appropriation. It is their excessive demands which call for excessive protection, the demands being excessive because the anaconda people are actually said to be attracted to *emasi* by the smell of their menstrual blood, something which excites them into a state of readiness and which is another very common theme in Guiana (Roth 1915: passim). This is something which the Waiwai find abhorrent. Menstruating women are subject to a great many restrictions which cause them to withdraw considerably from active life, but one of the strictest taboos to which they must adhere is that of sexual intercourse. It is an essential aspect of the anaconda people that they indulge in dangerous habits, though they only threaten the well-being of *emasi*. It is common in Guiana to find the idea that mature women, particularly when menstruating, can indulge in amorous adventures with snakes without ill-effect. Often they may seek them out (Roth 1915: passim).

The classic psychoanalytical interpretation of the symbolic appropriation of female sexual powers reduces the issue to one of womb envy (e.g. Bettelheim 1955) and I would contend that there is much to commend this view in the Waiwai case. When a society is premised on the domination of women *as a result of* the latter's superior productive potential, it is indeed a male conceit that men's power comes entirely from within themselves. If Meillassoux is correct in stating that women are "domesticated" because of their social and sexual vulnerability, then there is a contradiction involved between the basis of men's power as protective agents and the idea that male power stems essentially from superior strength. Menstruation, being the very mark of female procreative powers, and menarche, being the time when those powers first become manifest, cease then to become a simple, objective sign of fertility, and become in addition those things which threaten the superior power of the male. As a result, activities such as hunting and warfare, which are the regions in which the superior surface values of strength and violence are mainly exhibited, are said to be threatened by women, particularly by their menstrual blood. Arguments which state that such beliefs do not rest on psychological envy, because they are either socially determined (Douglas 1975) or do not find direct realization in the categories of actors (Lewis 1980), miss the point. I would argue that Waiwai men are envious of the procreative powers of women *because* of their social situation, but cannot allow themselves readily to *admit* the envy because of its threat to self-definition. Fock himself was of the impression that Waiwai men's inordinate dandiness was due to women's domination of the productive realm (1963: 212).¹⁷

¹⁷ Since I will be elaborating on similar "psychological" arguments below, this may be an appropriate moment to state that I regard such arguments as being altogether compatible with a Durkheimian framework: in short, they are sociological, and not psychological in the sense argued against by Durkheim. Conscious sentiments are always culturally defined, and even those which are unconscious are largely socially generated. There is no simple question of an "inner state" involved here. Sentiments, such as guilt, love, hate, envy and so on, are always relational, and it makes little sense to speak of them outside of a field of subject-object relations. The fact that sentiments vary considerably from person to person in any given social situation is not a barrier to seeing them as collectively orientated, since much the same variability applies to the recounting of myth, ritual exegesis and other

The belief that menstruation is a threat to hunting and male strength is, of course, a very general phenomenon, not only in South America but throughout the world. In the Waiwai situation Fock states:

There are special tabu rules for a menstruating woman in connexion with bags of game. She must not eat flesh killed by younger men, for if she does, they will not be able to kill their prey in future. She is, however, allowed to eat [but not to cook] all kinds of meat, provided it has been killed by older men. In addition, a menstruating woman must never eat the flesh of game that has been hunted or caught by dogs, which particularly refers to *poinko* [white-lipped peccary], though also to other animals.

The lower jaws, particularly of the tapir and wild pig [peccary]...., are always hung up under the dog shelf so that a menstruating woman shall not inadvertently come to step on them. Should she do so in the case of the tapir's lower jaw, her husband would never again see a tapir (1963: 159).

These prohibitions are part of a wider set which tend to immobilize women because of their presumed polluting influence, and on one level at least, it can be argued that when a girl reaches menarche, the time when her menstruation signifies her full reproductive potential, the *emasi* ritual exaggerates this immobility to an extent commensurate with excessive fertility. However, this is only part of the matter because, as I suggested earlier, taboos in connection with initiation and taboos in connection with "secondary menses" show important points of contrast.

If Waiwai men appropriate the reproductive powers of women through their conception beliefs, then they do so in relation to wives. But when fathers or other male relatives appropriate the fertility of women through *emasi* seclusion, they do so in relation to kinswomen — daughters and sisters. This suggests a further psychoanalytical hypothesis: namely, that female initiation somehow expresses an incest wish. I believe that such a hypothesis can be substantiated, mainly because of the latent or tacit association made between incest and menstruation. In another work (Morton 1976: 116) I suggested that the basis for this association stems from the fact that in a situation of uxorilocality, the partial negation of the marital tie, through the taboo on sexual intercourse with a menstruating wife, means that a woman is as close to her kinsmen as she is to her husband during her courses. The argument was probably stated too baldly, but I think it still holds. It is not that during menstruation the marriage relationship is deeply threatened and that a woman is necessarily perceived by her husband to be in danger of falling under the complete control of her kinsmen, since a woman's restrictions are such that she cannot undertake much work for anybody - spouse or kinsmen. However, the point is that a husband is subject to one more restriction during a woman's menstruation than are her kinsmen. Thus, in a logical sense, one that is ripe for mythic elaboration, the husband assumes a similar structural position as the woman's father or brothers. He is placed in a position of sexual abstinence from his wife, one that is already taken for granted in respect to her kinsmen.¹⁸

aspects of belief which no good Durkheimian would hesitate to classify as "collective representations" (see footnote 24). If the following "psychological" interpretations have any major fault, it is that I have been unable to draw on any information about the Waiwai's own cultural concepts of the emotions. Such information is simply not available.

¹⁸ The taboo on menstrual intercourse is not explicitly stated in the ethnography, though it is implied by the fact that women have to withdraw considerably from active life. Certainly, the Waiwai would be exceptional in Guiana if they did not observe such a taboo.

A number of other aspects of the ethnography support this association between menstruation and incest. In the first place, the restriction on women eating the meat of younger men and dogs, while being allowed to eat that caught by others, can be interpreted in terms of the ideal kin/affine distinction enshrined in the set of age terms listed above. Women's "secondary menses" correspond to the time after *emasi* when they are married as *ewshanyon*. The corresponding male age term is *piti* and these are the men who have married *ewshanyon*—they are affines. On the other hand, younger men who hunt are *karipamchan* and these are either sons or brothers of *ewshanyon*. A similar structural position is assumed by dogs because, as pets, they are thought of as children. It is women who care for dogs, and in Waiwai mythology the first women were acquired by men together with an adopted son and some dogs (Fock 1963: 42). The Waiwai also relate a myth about the moon (Fock 1963: 54-56) who, as a result of having sexual intercourse with his sister, lost his aim in the hunt, the very same result which is said to befall younger men if a menstruating woman consumes their catch. The idea seems to be that incest, as a form of social involution, has concomitant effects on the body by producing a form of blindness. Such blindness was, of course, a fate that befell Oedipus in Greek mythology and the moon's incest with his sister was said to cause great pain to his eyes. Menstruation, then, represents a threat, perhaps unconsciously grasped, of incest, something which "secondary menses" taboos are designed to alleviate. For if the husband of a menstruating woman has to forsake sexual access to her, something which her kinsmen have already done through the incest taboo, it is the husband only who can supply her with meat during the time of restriction. Thus the marital tie is reaffirmed.

Fock does not say that menstruating women are in any danger as a result of their incapacitation and this contrasts with the kinds of dangers to which an *emasi* girl is subject. In the former case, the woman threatens the hunter and his game, while in the latter, it is game, the anaconda people and various other aspects of the natural world which threaten the woman. If one were to use this inversion as a premise for deduction, one could predict that if "secondary menses" represent a threat of incest from the inside, which potentially negates a marital tie, "primary menses" during *emasi* restrictions represent a threat of incest from the outside, which potentially negates a tie of kinship. It is possible to show that such logic exists in Waiwai thought.

Periodically the Waiwai perform a dance festival known as *yamo*, a generic term for two similar types of ritual performance. *Yamo* dances are said to have been learned by shamans who once visited the anaconda people to find the correct procedures. Each dance lasts for two months, the inception being marked by the building of a small house in the village plaza where the men can don their costumes unseen by women and children, and retire to between dancing bouts. During the initial month the dance is exclusively male. The men, dressed in costumes which make them completely unrecognizable, dance outside the communal house while the women remain inside forbidden to cast their eyes on the dancers. The men also have special painted masks.

Purple marks are made on the face of the mask with a bark pigment of some kind, put on with the fingers. These marks do not show immediately they have been put on, we were told, but develop after a short period of time and have a slight resemblance to facial features. In spite of the description given ("bark pigment") it is possible that they are made of *genipa* (cf. the developing) (Yde 1965: 236).

During the second month of the dance the men discard the whistles which they have been playing during the previous active periods and take up rattles. They then move inside the house where the women are all seated on the ground, without any special costume save for a necklace. Remaining on the ground, the women make explicit sexual invitations to the men, while some younger men move in and out of the dancing line spitting water. All the time the women chant: "Come *yamo*, come *yamo*, come *yamo*; you are my *wayamnu*." *Wayamnu* is the reciprocal term for marriageable person or permitted sexual partner.¹⁹

The function of these dances is very uncertain, but a Wapishana man who witnessed a *yamo* dance with Holden said that they were an initiation into warriorhood (Holden 1938: 330). However, what is specifically interesting about them is that they are explicitly identified with the anaconda people. Not only were the dances learned from them, but the dancers themselves are associated with the snakes by the actions of the young men spitting water. This, it will be remembered, is the anaconda people's way of creating rising rivers and flooding. Both men and women are said to be *yamo*, yet the explicitly sexual nature of the dance seems perplexing when it is considered that female initiation is designed to prevent such intercourse transpiring. *Yamo* dances are also important in the way in which they contrast with other Waiwai dances —the *shodewika* and *manumtopo*. These are always inter-village affairs; are said to be held to cement alliances and to introduce visiting men to nubile host girls, and can take on the character of fertility rites. Holden (1938: 329) says that the *yamo* dance which he witnessed was attended by 25-30 people. This suggests an endogamous situation and Holden mentions nothing about the presence of a visiting group. Evidence from mythology suggests that this endogamy is a kind of incest enactment, since the aforementioned myth about the moon has an almost identical structure to the *yamo* dance.

The moon is said to have achieved intercourse with his sister through trickery. While half of him played a flute outside the communal house, the other half went inside under cover of darkness and seduced his unwitting but cooperative sister. In the *yamo* dance this division is expressed by the splitting of the performance into two cycles of the moon. During the first cycle, the men dance alone outside and play whistles, but during the second cycle they enter the house in an unrecognizable state and are invited to have sexual intercourse. In myth, the moon's sister discovers the identity of her brother by painting his face with *genipa* —a black dye— which is translated by Fock as *chanaimo* (1963: 55). It is said that this is the reason why the moon now darkens during its waxing and waning. This idea corresponds well with the manner in which the *yamo* dancers' face masks are painted with *chamnaimo*

¹⁹ The term translates literally as "my tortoise." In myth a tortoise was the mother of the twin culture heroes, Mawari and Washi, who were the progenitors of the human race. The character of these two heroes is discussed below.

(presumably identical to Fock's *chanaimo*), and it is perfectly possible that the resemblance to facial features is a variation on "the man-in-the-moon" theme. Fock suggests that: "Although it is realized that the menstruation interval corresponds with the lunation, the Waiwai do not appear to connect these two facts" (1963: 158). The evidence suggests the contrary; menstruation is linked to the moon through the intermediary concept of incest. The idea is consonant with the restrictions which are placed on *emasi* girls, menstruating women and female *yamo* participants. The Waiwai word for menstruation is *roupo*, which literally translates as "seated."

I am tentatively inclined to lend credibility to the chance remark made to Holden about the *yamo* dances turning men into warriors, in spite of Fock's assertion that Waiwai youths do not undergo any major form of initiation aside from a simple "ant-belt" ordeal (1963: 159). The dances have not been performed for some considerable time and it is possible that their initiatory importance has waned as a result of a protracted period of peaceful relations in the region. But if the *yamo* dance is indeed a ritual which creates warriors, it makes perfect sense that the initiands should be identified with the anaconda people, since these are the image of the raider *par excellence* in Waiwai thought.²⁰ But the question remains as to the nature of the link with incest.

Incest can be defined most generally as the keeping of kinswomen and it is often extremely difficult to divorce its sexual aspect from its social importance. Meillassoux, arguing against those who believe the incest taboo to have its roots in nature or those who play down its variability by calling it a cultural universal, has even gone so far as to suggest that:

Incest does not involve, any more than do other sexual practices that are claimed to be "abnormal" or "deviant", "natural" feelings of revulsion among the majority of people; on the contrary it seems to have exercised such a powerful attraction that wherever social conditions (such as the extension of the domestic group) facilitated its practice the resources of religious terrorism had to be enlisted to control it... Far from being inscribed in nature, the incest prohibition is the cultural transformation of endogamous prohibitions (a social proscription) into a sexual prohibition (i.e. a 'moral' or a 'natural' and absolute one). *It arises when control over marriage becomes one of the elements of political power.* In other words incest is a moral notion produced by an ideology which is tied to the extension of power in domestic communities, as one of the means used to control the mechanisms of reproduction. It is not an innate proscription, (if it were it would in fact be the only one of its kind). What is presented as a sin against nature is in fact only a sin against authority (1981: 12, original emphasis).

One does not have to agree with Meillassoux's cavalier dismissal of sociobiology in order to apply his insights into the political nature of the incest prohibition, and there is much here which is illuminating of Waiwai ethnography.

If the general function of the incest taboo is to ensure a certain degree of population mobility, and so to ensure in turn long-term reproduction of the relations of production, certain contradictions apply in relation to long-run and short-run pressures. For instance, under given short-run circumstances where the productive cell reproduces an adequate number of both males and females, there is

²⁰ Elsewhere (Morton 1979: 312) I reached the same conclusion by another (though related) route.

no intrinsic reason why brothers cannot marry sisters and ensure continuity from within. However, when groups start to "freeze" in this manner, they will inevitably find themselves with demographic problems at a later stage. Thus there is a contradiction between the value attached to short-term solutions to reproduction and long-term imperatives. I would suggest that it is just such tension which is at the heart of the problem of ZD marriage in Guiana. For while the prohibition of incest is at its strongest in relation to siblings and parallel cousins, it is under some stress when applied across genealogical levels due to the ambiguous nature of ZD and FZ, who, as well as being kinswomen, have latent affinal specifications according to the prescription of marriage with a cross cousin. ZD is the potential spouse of Ego's son, and FZ is the potential mother of Ego's spouse. Mother-in-law avoidance, which the Waiwai say is designed to allay the possibility of sexual relations, and ZD marriage can thus be seen as complementary phenomena. In one case there is a strengthening of the prohibition where it is potentially weak, and in the other the stress point is allowed to fracture. It is worth recalling here that Fock actually reports one case of FZ marriage (1963: 201).²¹

Rivière (1969a: 153) reports for the Trio that inter-genealogical level marriage has a marked tendency to take place when spouses are of the same generation. That is to say, such spouses tend to be of comparable age. The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that inter-genealogical level marriage is "like" marriage with a sister. The similarity, as well as the difference, between a wife and a sister is drawn by Fock when he says: "... the distinction between sister and *wayamnu*, between an economic and a sexual partner, has been dealt with; it can merely be said that a wife combines the two functions" (1963: 201), to which one might add that a ZD is much more "like" a sister than a cross cousin. In ZD marriage the possibility of sexual union within the *eta* of kinswomen becomes distinct, because unmarried men usually attach themselves to the *eta* of a sister. On those occasions when "incest" has been reported among particular groups, it is usual for it to be connected with ideas about the purity of a line of descent. Royal marriages in Hawaii, ancient Egypt and among the Azande are obvious cases in point. Given the well attested correlation between ZD marriage and endogamy in Guiana, I would contend that we are dealing with a phenomenon of the same type. Rivière (1969a: 282) and Overing Kaplan (1975: 203) in their studies of the Trio and Piaroa respectively both draw attention to the polluting aspect of the stranger. Some Piaroa told Overing Kaplan (1975: 203) that after death they are free of the polluting aspects of women because they are allowed to copulate with their sisters. However, the sex is infertile and the sisters no longer menstruate. As if to complete the logic of the closed cycle, they also say that it is no longer necessary to eat food. In their afterlife the Piaroa are autophagous. Even more instructive is a case of actual brother-sister marriage reported among the Pemon by Thomas (1982: 170-171).

Pollution, like endogamy, is always relative; it occurs whenever the internal or the external boundaries of the group are transgressed. In the case at hand, where

²¹ Why ZD marriage should be allowed to occur much more often than FZ marriage remains a problem and I leave the question open.

quasi-incestuous marriage and uxorilocality are born of exactly the same problem which leads to warfare and raiding (i.e. a shortage of women), the internal and external boundaries are closely associated. When a group jealously guards its female resources, there is continuous tension between contraction of the group through endogamy and extension of the group required to restore demographic interdependence. At any given historical moment the point where the boundary lies between the inside and the outside may vary, determined by the degree of endogamy which is either tolerated or sustained. Viewed from the inside, the self-sustaining group may see itself as pure, and any tendency towards incest will be euphemized. But viewed from the outside, self-sufficiency in marriage, especially at times when there is a shortage of women, will be viewed as impure and the tendency towards incest may be exaggerated or become an object of scorn. The Waiwai view of the anaconda people typifies this latter mode of thought. But at the same time, while the outside may be viewed as dangerously incestuous, the attribution is made on the basis of behaviour (i.e. endogamy) which the inner group holds in high esteem. If this is the case, then we are confronted with a situation where, in imagining and "worshipping" the anaconda people, the Waiwai illustrate perfectly the truth of the Durkheimian proposition that a society creates its own image through the sacred. While the image remains exterior and is, indeed, informed by external properties, it is also a reflection of an internal, though possibly unrealized, state of affairs.

Projection and exploitation

Nisbet (1976: vii-ix) has drawn attention to the fact that Durkheim's theory of religion is not informed by the monolithic holism which is often attributed to it. Because of the constant emphasis on the role of sentiment existing in the mind of the believer, Nisbet suggests that the theory is at least partly phenomenological. Here is an example of how some Indians in Guiana react to anacondas; the reference is to the Taruma.²²

If a stranger attempts to kill one [an anaconda] they object and say, "He is one of our people." When they see one along the river they salute him and call him uncle [MB/father-in-law]. The first one I saw when travelling with our men in a large canoe, I shot and was surprised to find that all of the men dropped their faces in the bottom of the canoe. When I asked what it all meant they told me and begged me not to shoot any more anacondas. I promised, but some months later as we were going along a very narrow stream we found one lying on some brush that had fallen across and blocked our passage. We should have had to cut our way through within three feet of it. They were afraid to go so near and asked me to shoot it (Farabee 1918: 148-149).

This anecdote is a powerful illustration of the ambiguity with which anacondas are viewed. They are respected and given human qualities, but they instil much fear by the power of their presence; they are, in the psychoanalytical sense of the term,

²² The Taruma were close neighbours of the Waiwai, though they were not Carib speakers. They are now extinct, but they inter-married extensively with the Waiwai and shared the latter's interest in the anaconda people and other mythical themes (Farabee 1918: 143-158). The history of the Taruma is documented in Butt Colson and Morton 1982.

uncanny. The reference to the anaconda being a father-in-law is informed by myth, which in the Waiwai case takes the following form. According to the Waiwai version of Creation, the first women were acquired without negotiation by the culture hero, Mawari, from the anaconda people. Mawari took the women by fishing them up from the river along with several items of culture necessary for female life. There were two such anaconda women, one of whom Mawari married and whose son he adopted, while giving the other away to his twin brother, Washi. The twins took the women away and tried to have sexual intercourse with them, in spite of the women's warning about the presence of piranha fish living in their vaginas. Washi had his penis bitten off, but the more astute Mawari had previously bathed his wife's vagina with an infusion of sweet-smelling bananas. As a result, the piranha fish fell out and Mawari kept his penis intact. Both twins had a number of children and Washi took one of his daughters as an extra wife. Mawari's children, on the other hand, all died, save for a son and a daughter who married incestuously to become the progenitors of the Waiwai and all other Indian groups. It was Mawari who first secluded his daughter in a *wayapa*. "When Mawari's daughter became *emasi*, Mawari asked his wife what they were to do about it; the *Okoimo* [Anaconda] woman answered: 'Place her in *wayapa*, otherwise the *Okoimo* people will come to take her, for they are kinsfolk, our *poimo* [brothers-in-law]' " (Fock 1963: 42). In the meantime, Mawari became angry because so many of his children had died. He decided to ascend to heaven with his wife by making a long ladder which swayed in the wind. And so he left the earth to Washi and the other humans who were descended from the twins and their wives.

This mythical episode, which was given to Fock as part of a longer, more integrated narrative (1963: 38-48),²³ forms the basis of the Waiwai belief that the anaconda people are related to them as affines. As Fock points out:

The *Okoimo-yenna* [Anaconda-people] are considered brothers-in-law because Mawari... married one of their women. They therefore want bride price or a woman in exchange... the social system prevailing in the myth was both patrilineal and patrilocal, as Mawari's daughter follows his relationship in regard to the *Okoimo-yenna* and his wife is fished up to his sphere of existence (1963: 45).

This means that Mawari's acquisition of a wife was equivalent to raiding. All affinal obligations were dispensed with —no bride service was worked, no bride price was paid, and no woman was returned in exchange— simply by going to the home of the anaconda people and taking away women. It is this act of theft which provides part of the mythical background to female initiation.

At the end of the Mawari myth mention is made of the fact that the *Okoimo-yenna* always pursue the Waiwai girls because they never received payment for the *Okoimo* woman whom Mawari fished up. This eternal claim is a parallel to the strict rule about bride price and bride service which... can make a young man dependent for life on his wife's family (Fock 1963: 48).

²³ A formal analysis of the whole myth, framed in terms of the nature/culture distinction, can be found in Morton (1979: 71-108).

It was mentioned earlier that the anaconda people are identified as raiders who threaten women, yet this was the very characteristic which marked the activity of the culture hero, Mawari, and which was the direct cause of the anaconda people for ever making their threats. Thus, while female initiation is a defence against the raider, the defender himself is also a raider, which is exactly the point made by Meillassoux about abductors and protectors being in similar roles. Furthermore, Meillassoux's thesis on the link between hunting techniques and marriage-by-capture seems to be confirmed by Mawari's raid being equated with fishing. Prior to capturing the anaconda women, Mawari had spent his youth among the jaguar people. It was there that he learned his hunting prowess which allowed him to fish in the river by using an arrow. However, in respect to the Janus-like character of the abductor/protector, matters of contradiction are involved, because to deny the exchange of women with the anaconda people is to deny the general principle of reciprocity which articulates Waiwai marriage. This in turn leads to the problem of incest, something which is actually addressed in the myth. At the dawn of Creation, when the shortage of women was most acute, endogamy was as incestuous as it could be; Washi took his daughter as an extra wife and Mawari's son and daughter married each other. Nevertheless, the message of everyday life and the message of myth is essentially the same: it is better to marry a close kinswoman than to run the risk of alliance with a stranger. Of particular note is the fact that Mawari's son could only marry his sister by virtue of her initiation which kept her in her village. And while the myth does not state as much, one might assume that the same conditions applied to Washi's marriage with his daughter. On the other hand, the twins themselves were ignorant of the significance of menstruation and initiation until they were told about it by their wives —anaconda women— and it is therefore implied that the anaconda people themselves aspire to the same degree of endogamous self-sufficiency.

If the Waiwai do, as I have argued, show a tendency towards incestuous marriage, then the logic of endogamy would allow marriage with a sister or a daughter, the very situation which obtained in mythical time. Marriage of this kind actually represents one of the most economical and least risky short-term solutions to *eta* and settlement reproduction. But, of course, society intervenes here and invariably bans such unions, and in this way long-term values are protected. This is both the power of society as an abstraction and the power of those individuals within the group who ensure continuity of its internal and external relations. But while society may impose its long-term values on its individuals, short-term requirements are such that those values may be in danger of being ignored. I will argue here that, as individuals, Waiwai people harbour incestuous wishes and that myth and ritual prevent those wishes being realized, while at the same time allowing channels for their expression. A fruitful inroad into this argument is a comparison of the anaconda people, who are feared and loathed, with Mawari, the hero who exhibited in extreme all those virtues of strength and daring with which Waiwai men identify.

That the anaconda people are implicitly incestuous has already been established. Elsewhere in Guiana there are various beliefs which complement this

characteristic. The Waiwai say that the anaconda people are immortal; they have always existed in the world and always will. Roth (1915: 149-150) states that anacondas are said to be immortal in Guiana because, like other snakes, lizards, spiders and other creatures, they undergo ecdysis. Roth (1915: 246), Campbell and Rivière (1978: 49) and Kloos (1971: 97-98) report that anacondas are also said to be angry and murderous in the presence of childbirth. I have argued elsewhere (Morton 1979: 158-159) that the complex of Guianese beliefs concerning anacondas, incest, menstruation, immortality and childbirth forms a coherent image which portrays a society which is completely suspended in time because it knows no life-cycle, something which seems vouchsafed by the Akawaio metaphor which attributes great coldness to anacondas (Butt Colson 1976: 466). I do not wish to suggest by this that every element of the complex will be encountered in every society in Guiana, or even in the consciousness of each individual in any particular society. Rather, because of the key role which anacondas have in mythic imagination, which ties them closely to ideas about menstruation and femininity, there are marked tendencies for certain kinds of specific attributes to be placed on them and their aquatic companions. The problem, as I see it, is one which is concerned with the resistances which will be met when individuals express ideas which are tied to unconscious impulses (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1970: 5-6).²⁴ Nevertheless, the anaconda people do seem to share most of those qualities exhibited by other mythical creatures which show a marked concern for blood. Vampires and the undead are obvious examples, and the second name comes very close to that which the Waiwai use for the anaconda people, *okoimo-yenna*, which translates literally as "people of the great death." It has been said of Dracula that he cannot see his own reflection in the mirror because he *is* the reflection (of those who have created him in their imagination) (Gooch 1975: 259). If the anaconda people are the means by which Waiwai men make themselves known to themselves, only to avoid the recognition, it makes a certain sense for them to say that the anaconda people only ever show themselves to women, never to men. Among the Barasana, female initiands have to avoid mirrors (Hugh-Jones C. 1979: 135), and Kloos (1971: 229) recounts a Maroni River Carib myth which tells of how the discovery of a female initiand's meeting with an anaconda causes her to disappear into thin air.²⁵

There is a sense in which the imagined society of the anaconda people

²⁴ Since structuralists are often accused of over-systematizing mythological or ritual systems (e.g. Brunton 1980), the Lévi-Straussian view is worth quoting: "There is no real end to mythological analysis, no hidden unity to be grasped once the breaking down process has been completed... Consequently the unity of the myth is never more than tendential and projective and cannot reflect a state or a particular moment of the myth. It is a phenomenon of the imagination, resulting from the attempt at interpretation; and its function is to endow the myth with synthetic form and to prevent its disintegration into a confusion of opposites." Thus the "phenomenon of the imagination" only displays its unity in diversity through the interpretation of inconsistencies and contradictions.

²⁵ The only men who can see the anaconda people are shamans, even though they fear contact with menstrual blood. The complication is explicable in terms of other associations (see footnote 16). Like Dracula, Maroni River Carib shamans avoid garlic (Kloos 1968: 17). For some stimulating, if rather erratic, interpretations of vampires and their connections with virgins, menstrual blood and shamans, see Shurtle and Redgrove (1980: 238-273).

represents an ideal of ultimate endogamy, something to which real society can only do its best to approximate. The only occasion when something like the ideal occurred was in mythical time when kinsmen married. This wish-fulfilment element of mythology is somewhat disguised by the structural position of Mawari in the Creation myth. Although his heroic deeds strongly identify him with male ideals of power, a closer examination of the myth shows him to have very similar qualities to the anaconda people. Like them he is immortal, something which is heavily emphasized by his climb to heaven with his wife on a swaying ladder. This conjunction between sky and earth, which Mawari created by making arrow rungs and shooting them into the vault of heaven, is exactly duplicated at the end of the moon myth. In both myths, the moon and Mawari, together with their wives, are said to ascend to the sky because of the actual or potential deaths of their children. Elsewhere in Waiwai mythology (Fock 1963: 83) the link between sky and earth is a gigantic anaconda. Between the explicit incest of the moon and the explicit liking for menstrual blood by anacondas, Mawari too is implicitly incestuous, although the myth resorts to metaphorical and metonymical devices to disguise the fact. Instead of being incestuous himself, it is his alter ego, Washi, who marries his daughter, and his son who marries his sister, but only in the latter case by virtue of Mawari learning about the anaconda people's practice of *emasi* seclusion. And instead of Mawari being attributed with a liking for menstrual blood, we find that he bathes his wife's vagina with an infusion of sweet bananas in order to dispose of the biting piranhas. Evidence suggests that this is a euphemism for menstrual intercourse. Waiwai shamans, whose taboo on menstrual blood and *emasi* contact is extremely strong, also observe a prohibition on eating soft bananas because they smell sweet and strong. The Akawaio regard discharged menstrual blood as being cold and sweet, and take hot, bitter medicines to stem the flow. Sweet foods are said to "cause blood" (Butt 1961: 156; Butt Colson 1976: 457-462).

Several subsidiary points confirm the idea that Mawari achieves a form of ideal manhood which involves contradictory ideas connected with moral purity. In each case the unpleasant aspect of Mawari's character is transposed onto Washi. The twins' penes were enormously large prior to having sexual intercourse with their wives. As a result of ridding his wife's vagina of piranhas, Mawari kept his enormous penis intact. Washi, on the other hand, indulged in a kind of parody of the cycle of erection and detumescence through sexual contact. His enormous penis was devoured and he nearly died as a result, though Mawari healed him and created for him a new but much smaller penis. Similarly, while it was Mawari who stole women from the anaconda people, Washi received his woman as a gift from his brother. Were a man to bestow a woman in real life on his own brother, this would normally be incestuous. While most of Mawari's children died, Washi's were not said to do so. Washi thus appears as more fertile than Mawari, something which is possibly connected with the diminution of his penis. Using comparative South American material on theories of conception, I have argued elsewhere (Morton 1979: 145-158) that menstruation is a cold activity which effectively aborts a man's semen (= child) placed in the care of a woman. Conception is said to take place when the vagina is hot, and it is this which informs the ideas of castration and

vagina dentata, the debilitating effects of which Mawari escaped. As a result he had few children, but since he went to heaven to lead an immortal life, one might conclude that, as for the Piaroa in their afterlife, this was of no great concern to him in the long run.

In brief, what I am suggesting here is that there is a number of unconscious associations and wishes in the minds of Waiwai people which materialize in myth as a kind of ambiguously ideal world where all the problems of life are overcome. Union with a sister precludes affinity; not having children means that there is no pressure to reproduce; and a lack of fear of menstruation means that a man does not have his strengths and energies tapped, so leading to an eternal existence. But such latent values cannot possibly serve the purposes of the group; they are possible solutions to the exigencies of life as experienced by the individual. And that the energies which they potentially produce threaten the long-term values of the group was succinctly summarized by Durkheim, when he said that in society: "... we are obliged to submit ourselves to rules of conduct and of thought which we have neither made nor desired, and which are sometimes even contrary to our most fundamental inclinations and instincts" (1976: 207). Durkheim also realized that the sacred and profane worlds are in some sense fundamentally antagonistic to each other and that this antagonism is at the roots of ascetic rites (1976: 39-40). But while Durkheim struggled to specify the way in which the sacred instils sentiments which preclude the atomizing of the individual into a state of self-interest, it was Freud who contributed the complementary theory as to how sentiments are channelled along appropriate and (generally) socially acceptable pathways. As a final comment on the complex social importance of female initiation, I will now elaborate on some psychoanalytical hypotheses about its transformational values.

The sexual importance of an *emasi* girl is stressed time and time again in the ethnography. Not only is the key element of ritual seclusion the fact that an *emasi* menstruates and demonstrates her reproductive potential, but the great majority of restrictions are designed to enhance her fertility and sexual attractiveness. Closely tied to these prohibitions are others which make a girl compliant, industrious and energetic. Indeed, in the short-run significance of initiation, these latter qualities are above all others in importance. Not only is the girl subject to a stern moral lecture after seclusion, but she enters immediately into an extended period of hard labour.

For about two years around initiation (i.e. about 11-13 years of age) the adolescent girl is called *emasi*. The whole period is stamped by hard work, the older women trying continually to keep the *emasi* employed. It was often noticed that the *emasi* had to do household work even when the other members of the family were assembled for a common meal (Fock 1963: 158).

There is an ideal requirement that after seclusion a girl should not have sexual relations of any kind for at least one month, and she is not supposed to take a spouse for at least two years. Such restrictions, particularly the first, are difficult to sustain. Some girls are bold enough to have had sexual relations with men even prior to initiation, and families who urgently require male services in their *eta* may well try

to bestow a woman fairly soon after ritual seclusion. Nevertheless, these restrictions are operable whenever it is possible to enforce them, and the one on marriage must be seen as having immense social importance. The *emasi* period, being stamped by intense hard work, is the time when a girl demonstrates those primary qualities which make her attractive as a wife. The longer a girl can be shown to be consistently cooperative, diligent and indefatigable, the greater will be the value placed on her in the marriage negotiation. The *emasi* period thus has functional utility over and above its safeguarding of productive and reproductive powers. *It increases the value of a woman in exchange* and thereby enhances the prospects of a more satisfactory marriage settlement for her family. In other words, the productive power of women is translatable into social and political power over men through the extension of bride service obligations. This recalls Meillassoux's remarks on the incest prohibition being an aspect of the extension of political power.

I assume that women share with men a fear of the polluting stranger and one would expect this to be so if the dominant ideology is male-centred. The tendency towards incest which results from this is elaborated in its female aspect in mythology. The first women were anacondas and it is a condition to which they are in danger of returning during their *emasi* period. And while the wives of Mawari and Washi are portrayed as cooperative, the story of the anaconda people in which a young *emasi* girl was nearly abducted emphasizes the dangerous curiosity of the girl. She ignores advice about not looking at the river and so summons up the terrifying forces of the anacondas from below. In contrast with "secondary menstruation," which threatens the eyes of men, "primary menstruation" is itself a threat conceived of in terms of visual incontinence. Aggressive sexual connection does not ensue, but it seems to be symbolically portrayed and suppressed with intricate imagery. In the absence of men to protect her, because they have all left the village to visit another, the girl hides inside a pot in the communal house. A giant armadillo then tunnels up from the river to the house so causing the floor to dampen. Small members of the anaconda people, fish and frogs, enter the pot with the water and eventually the whole of the house, village plaza and cassava gardens are flooded. Before leaving the village the anaconda people leave behind a number of ceremonial adornments as gifts for their brothers-in-law. As if to deny the role of these adornments as bride price, the myth describes how they are made of perishable materials which soon go rotten. However, the Waiwai, who caught a glimpse of them on their return, were so impressed with them that they decided to make their own. It is noteworthy here that the initiand is only threatened by anacondas in the absence of her elders, save for a single old woman, but as soon as the anaconda people leave the village, those elders return to lament the flood. The absence of key figures, and their replacement by "monsters," is, of course, a standard mythological device according to psychoanalytical interpretation.

That women desire union with the anaconda people is emphasized in another myth where a woman takes her pet anaconda with her when she marries a macaw man and lives virilocally. She keeps the pet anaconda in a nearby river, but is so stingy with her gifts of meat to the snake that it eventually consumes her instead, an

action which leads her affines into a successful quest for revenge. The idea seems to be that the woman is re-embraced by her kinsmen after marriage, an intention one might expect to be readily apparent to the Waiwai given the norm of uxorilocality, but it is obliquely portrayed through the metaphors of "pet" (= kinsman) and "swallowing" (= reclamation). As I noted earlier, the theme of women having willing relationships with anacondas is a recurrent one in Guiana. Unlike men, then, women have a tendency to be attracted to anacondas. If it is true that the anaconda is as much an unconscious image of the internal incestuous threat as the conscious image of the external abductor, then it is clear that the threat of incest is transposed fully onto the shoulders of women. Woman is guilty of the desire primarily through the involuntary olfactory stimulus of menstruating.

Beidelman (1966) has argued that Nuer attachment to ritual symbols can be accounted for in terms of libidinal transference and I believe that Waiwai symbolic paraphernalia can be interpreted in the same manner. It is a central tenet of psychoanalytical theory that when the demands of the Id (or unconscious) are frustrated by the demands of the Super-Ego, the energy that is pent up finds expression through the processes of condensation, displacement and sublimation. That is to say, the wish or impulse is projected elsewhere onto symbolically appropriate objects while alternative strategies are developed to release frustrations. In the case at hand, I have suggested that displacement occurs by projecting incest and aggressive sexuality onto anacondas (and women who were themselves originally anacondas). With regard to the process of condensation, which is a feature of ritual symbols everywhere, latent associations are numerous. The phallic attributes of the snake are too obvious to comment on, though the idea of excessive sexual power is only enhanced by the fact that anacondas may grow to as long as thirty feet. They have uterine associations as well, since anacondas are constrictors with enormous jaws which they can unhinge to swallow their prey whole. Prior to swallowing, anacondas salivate liberally over the prey, and swallowing itself is often marked by periodic disgorging to gain a better hold. Digestion is extremely protracted. The snake goes into a long period of sluggishness while the chemical changes in its stomach produces a foul, musky stench from its toothed jaws. Indigestible parts of food, such as bones, are later vomited up. Anacondas have an extremely acute sense of smell and this is particularly interesting given their associations with dogs and piranha fish in mythology. Piranhas are quickly attracted to blood and one does not have to be a Waiwai woman to appreciate the interest shown by domestic dogs in menstruation.²⁶ The aquatic environment of the anaconda also seems to associate them with the idea of birth. Rivière (1969a: 264) says that Trio symbolic birth invariably occurs through water, and anacondas themselves are viviparous, giving birth to up to sixty young at a time, each one measuring from 2-3 feet in length. The aquatic

²⁶ I suspect that the threat to women by anacondas may be quite real, if also rare. George Mentore (personal communication) says that the Waiwai refuse to bathe in the river while using sweet-smelling soap because it attracts anacondas. March (1980) has hypothesized that carnivores in general tend towards aggressive curiosity in the presence of human menstrual blood, and it appears possible that bear attacks on women in Yellowstone National Park, U.S.A., are connected with menstrual odour.

environment also, of course, associates anacondas with fish, and Lévi-Strauss (1970: 257-281) discusses at length the associations between fish, femininity and stench in South America. Other aquatic animals serve equally well as key symbols in this complex. A Trio informant, who narrated a myth about a water spirit being in charge of the feminine elements of culture before they were shown to man, switched the leading persona from alligator to anaconda without any sense of discontinuity (Rivière 1969a: 259-261). The alligator also vomits up the indigestible parts of its prey and, in addition, has the habit of carrying its young about in its jaws. Finally, with regard to the "frozen" or "still" nature of anaconda society, it has been documented that an anaconda may survive for as long as two and half *years* in a torpid state after a large feed. Reptiles (and fish) are also, of course, cold-blooded. The degree to which particular aspects of the anaconda's character are known by individuals will no doubt vary, but it is clear that many of the snake's physical characteristics (and I make no claim to have exhausted the symbolic repertoire) make it a powerful image of unconstrained sexuality. All in all, the anaconda is probably best described as a diffuse image of an aggressive phallic mother.

But if the projecting of incestuous and/or aggressive wishes onto anacondas is a process of the imagination, fantasies of this kind are not in themselves sufficient; action (sublimation) is always required to stabilize the psychic economy. In the case of Waiwai men this process may be somewhat diffuse. Unless one takes into account the *yamo* dances as being a preparation for warriorhood, men are not subject to any traumatic experience of initiation, save for a relatively minor "ant-belt ordeal." Their activities may change at adolescence, but apart from the normal restrictions of everyday life, they are not subjected to great inhibited activity. They simply become aware of the (possibly arduous) task of seeking a spouse, and their orientation is so geared to the outside world through hunting that they are ready to channel their energies in that direction if necessary. Furthermore, quite apart from this aggressive orientation to the outside, men's sexuality is not generally constrained. Sexual relations of a casual kind with married women are common and are a constant source of potential conflict in the community. Nevertheless, such promiscuity is tolerated, only leading to trouble when a wife is caught *flagrante delicto* with her lover. Even then, disapproval may simply be signified by jostling, more often with the woman than the man, which is perfectly compatible with my comments about women being seen as the instigators of sexual liaisons.

Such licence is not permitted to pubescent women. At the very time when they become aware of their sexuality and undergo bodily changes which accentuate their libidinal energy, everything is designed to frustrate their desires. Not only do their kinsmen try to restrict their sex lives, but girls themselves are immediately subject to the trauma of social dislocation and sensory abstinence for a period of two months. The deprivation of sensory gratification also occurs when their awareness of imaginary dangers from anacondas is heightened. Freud defined a trauma in the following way:

... the term "traumatic" has no other sense than an economic one. We apply it to an experience which within a short period of time presents the mind with an increase of stimulus too powerful to be dealt with or worked off in the normal way, and this must result in permanent disturbances of the manner in which the energy operates (1973: 315).

In the case of the *emasi* ritual, the trauma is almost entirely characterized by internal stimuli. Weeks of boredom and restriction cause a girl to fall back on little other than the imaginary conditions said to make initiation necessary in the first place, conditions which can only be reduced in terms of immediate factors by reflection on a specific bodily condition - a bleeding vagina. One feels that Huxley hit the nail squarely on the head when he said for the Urubu:

When a girl menstruates for the first time, therefore, she is repeating woman's age old offence of contradicting man's pretensions, by showing that - mythology notwithstanding - it is she who makes children, and not him. *This is her guilt*, and the pain she undergoes during her initiation as a woman lets her atone for it; by this means the contradiction between the masculine world of mythology and the feminine world of physical reality is resolved (1956: 149, my emphasis).

But this trauma, and the guilt that it instils, is not far from the release necessary for psychic stability. Casualties do occur, since Fock (1963: 134) reports a case of an unmarried girl who is deaf and morbidly apathetic. But young women are invariably robust workers who are keenly desired by the men who may outnumber them. It cannot be purely coincidental that as soon as a girl is violently tugged from her *wayapa* seclusion, she is given a lecture on industry and obedience and then set to hard work; work so hard that her lack of relaxation marks her off from the rest of the community. Her lesson is clear: sexual intercourse should be curtailed, something which one might expect to be more readily acceptable given the fear instilled of marauding anacondas, and compliance is necessary to the elders who have afforded protection. As a result, the *eta* and the village acquire a degree of excess labour; a kind of payment for the excess protection given by seclusion. Unlike the situation with men, all the girl's energies are directed inwards to the family group and her co-villagers. It is *they* who issue commands; it is *they* who derive the benefits from a girl's unflagging industry; and it is *they*, I would suggest, especially the girl's father and mother, who are represented in their exploitative role by the anaconda people.

One could describe this kind of excessive dependence on the family as a form of "sociological incest." The flood of energy which female initiation is deemed to control is vividly portrayed in the myth of the anaconda people when the river rises to inundate the communal house, the plaza and the cassava gardens. But these are precisely the same regions in which the girl will be set to work after seclusion when she labours at the hearth, the cassava graters and presses placed in the outlying workhouses, and in the fields. The degree to which female initiation can successfully transform the potentially destructive flood into an abundance of labour kept within the confines of the *eta* and village is of the greatest social, economic and political importance. The more a girl can produce, the greater will be the dependence of her future husband on his affines. A woman who is passive,

submissive and industrious acts as considerable leverage in extracting passivity, submission and industry from a junior affine. Indeed, female initiation, and the degree of excess labour which it promotes, assumes great importance in the field of inter-village politics. Mentore (1975) has described how *shodewika* festivals, ritual occasions designed to introduce outside men to nubile host women, are of prime significance in Waiwai power relations. A description of these festivals, and the intricate symbolism involved in their performance, would be out of place in this paper. It may merely be said, however, that they depend for their success on the degree to which host villages can ply their guests with vast quantities of tapioca drinks and beer, both of which are derived from the cassava plant. A compliant female work force is thus essential for the creation of this ritual food given away by men. Elsewhere (Morton 1979: 276-295) I have undertaken a detailed symbolic analysis of the *shodewika* festival. My general conclusion was that the festival enacts a ritual transition of the raider, transformationally related to the anaconda people, into a man fit to join the local community through marriage. A key element in the symbolism is the transformational relationship between cassava beer and menstrual blood. The Akawaio describe drunkenness as being "stupified like fish" (Butt 1961: 144) and use anaconda charms to make their drinks strong and sweet (Butt, 1957: 48; 1961: 149).

The degree to which men can symbolically appropriate the reproductive capacities of women, and thereby materially appropriate their productive potential, is no doubt contingent on a variety of circumstances in life history. I do not wish to suggest here that all Waiwai girls are equally compliant and productive, and certainly not that they are all equally sexually restrained during adolescence, since this latter point is belied by the ethnography which shows how, by our own standards, Waiwai girls are given considerable sexual licence (Guppy 1961: 237-243). Nor do I wish to overstate the question of guilt which is attached to menstruation. Attitudes to female procreative powers no doubt vary enormously according to the nature of inter-personal relations and individual consciousness. To say, as I have, that women are *guilty* of menstruating is to say no more than that menstruation is stigmatized to some degree, and that this stigmatization gives rise to a range of concomitant sentiments which will emerge under given social circumstances in varying modalities. Nevertheless, I believe that I have shown that female initiation exists as a social fact precisely because of its potential to harness libidinal energy which is tied to the extension of power in the Waiwai community.

When Beidelman discussed this problem with respect to the Nuer, he was led to quote Freud in the following illuminating manner:

Those sexual instincts which are inhibited in their aims have a great functional advantage over those which are uninhibited. Since they are not capable of really complete satisfaction, they are especially adapted to create permanent ties; while those instincts which are directly sexual incur a loss of energy each time they are satisfied, and must wait to be renewed by a fresh accumulation of sexual libido, so that meanwhile the objects may have been changed. The inhibited instincts are capable of any degree of admixture with the uninhibited; they can be transformed back into them, just as they arose out of them (Freud, in Beidelman 1966: 463-464).

In respect of female initiation, then, my main point is this. Female initiation provides the medium through which a variety of sexual and aggressive instincts are blocked. However, the objects to which those instincts are attached —father, mother, daughter and brother— remain in a modified form, and the energy is transformed into a durable tie between the initiand and her initiators. Passive sexuality on the girl's part is converted into passive labour, and female initiation makes a transformational link between reproduction and production, and between fertility and productivity. This is because, as Meillassoux has rightly said, the *social* vulnerability of a woman cannot be divorced from her *sexual* vulnerability.

This interpretation is capable of being checked by comparing the *emasi* ritual with the *yamo* dance. If *yamo* dances are a form of male initiation said to produce warriors, then they are capable of the following interpretation. They promote the idea of sexual relations within the village, and even bring them to partial fruition with erotic dancing within the sight of female co-residents. One cannot say for sure whether actual sexual relations of an endogamous or incestuous kind take place, though sexual license is a general feature of other Waiwai dance festivals such as the *shodewika*. This, then, would be a direct inversion of female initiation. Young men, acting as anacondas, would have their immediate sexual and aggressive energies released in the village, so facilitating their general orientation to the outside world where it is hoped they will obtain women. While women are passively protected by *emasi* seclusion, *yamo* dancers are active participants whose inner frustrations are capable of periodic discharge. According to the Freudian position outlined above, this discharge would not prove helpful in creating lasting ties and would so enhance young men's efforts to seek a bride, preferably through marriage-by-capture, from outside. *Emasi* girls are never allowed to attend dance festivals of any description.

Finally, all of this leads directly back to the forces and relations of production. If ritual plays its part in immobilizing women in the homes of their kinsmen, while at the same time enhancing men's mobility in marriage, the transformational relationships between sexual and economic ties are not arbitrary. They arise because a scarce product (female fertility) is tied inevitably to a plentiful one (cassava), and because men's hunting abilities are inextricably entwined with their intentions in marriage. So far as female initiation is concerned, this dialectic of scarcity and surplus allows excessive and potentially dangerous ties (incest) to be converted into excessive but socially productive ties (uxorilocality and "gynecostatism"). The short-term desire for self-sufficiency in the reproductive realm, which cannot be realized because of its contrareity to long-term values, is reorientated towards a form of productive self-sufficiency where surplus labour can be appropriated.

But here I have reached the limits of the analysis at hand. The appropriation of excess female labour, which produces a great deal more cassava than is necessary for short-term subsistence requirements, finds its value in another field; namely, in the aforementioned inter-village dance festivals where vast amounts of cassava beer and tapioca drink are consumed by visiting outsiders. The analysis of the

tremendous political significance of these festivals belongs to another work. However, I should state here that I believe that female initiation is only one aspect of a wider set of interconnected ritual procedures (dance festivals, curing rites, hunting prohibitions, the *couvade* and mortuary practices) which allows Waiwai society to reproduce and develop in its totality over time. Contradictions, mechanisms of projection, exploitation and ideologies, all firmly grounded in the material conditions of life, can be traced throughout the whole of the set.²⁷ But if this study is in a sense only preliminary, I will be satisfied if it has shown that symbolic transformations are not simply matters of intellectual speculation or straightforward reflections of the social order. Rather, they are a complex of convoluted signs, each possessing a value in respect of all others, and which have the power to move men to mould their material environment. Female initiation is one small, though significant, part of this in the Waiwai case. Through its complex signification, female powers are simultaneously created and appropriated so that values become capable of being exchanged. To put the matter even more succinctly, female initiation helps to convert use-value into exchange-value.

If in the end it is men who dominate this exchange in culture, so appearing to relegate women to the side of nature, then it may be as well to leave the last word to a woman.

In my view, the opposition between culture and nature represents an externalization of the relation between mind and body or between consciousness and instinct. It originates primarily in the tendency of some structuralist anthropologists to extrapolate universal cultural categories from an unspecified theory about the internal operation of the human mind (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1969: 3-11). Characteristics which we ordinarily impute to "human nature", such as baseness and rampant uncontrollability, the nature/culture model of explanation attributes to native conceptions of the environment. Human nature is driven out of the body into the wilderness and deprived of its sexual content. If we view the model as a distorted version of psychic relations, then we see that it "confuses" the control which human consciousness exerts upon our inner selves with the intended purpose of culture, as expressed in ritual, to triumph over productions of the non-human environment (Gillison 1980: 171-172).²⁸

²⁷ Some of the symbolic transformations and their relationship to the idea of reciprocity are the specific themes of my M.Litt. thesis (Morton 1979).

²⁸ While there is plenty of good comparative South American material relevant to the symbolic themes discussed in this paper (e.g. Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971; Hugh-Jones C. 1979; Hugh-Jones S. 1979; Seeger 1981), Gillison's article on the Gimi of the New Guinea Highlands is of some importance because of the similarity (of both content and interpretation) to my own analysis. Gillison maintains that the Gimi conceive of a menstruating woman as a variation on the phallic mother theme. That is to say, a woman who menstruates is thought to be in possession of potentially parthenogenetic creativity. Furthermore, this parthenogenesis has incestuous overtones due to Gimi conception beliefs, which closely parallel those found in South America. Because any child, male or female, is said to be composed entirely of male substance (semen), menstruation, as a form of failed birth, represents a woman's vain attempt to create from within by using only male substance derived from her father. Gillison elaborates on this and shows how menstruation is stigmatized by the subtleties of a male-centred ideology which disallows any marked auto-creativity to be attributed to women. A similar complex of beliefs is hinted at in the Waiwai material on cotton spinning during *emasi* seclusion, since *couvade* practices suggest that cotton is symbolic of semen. A *couvading* mother with a male child will not spin cotton for fear of binding the child's penis too tightly, so suggesting, to put the matter all too baldly, that the spinning of cotton during initiation represents an attempt by the initiand to keep her "penis" intact. This in turn

Abstract

The Waiwai initiate their women with an elaborate seclusion ritual which is deemed to have both natural and moral force. The purpose of the ritual is simultaneously to protect young girls from the ravages of the anaconda people, a class of spiritual beings who live in the rivers, and to instil virtues such as willingness, honesty, obedience and industry. The paper attempts to answer the questions of why and how the ritual takes place. Initially, there is an analysis of the factors which give rise to the high value placed upon women in the community and the position which women have in social structure as a result of that value. This analysis is Marxist in orientation and in part draws upon the work of Claude Meillassoux on the importance of women as biological reproducers in domestic communities. After a description of the initiation ritual, structuralist techniques are applied to myth, ritual and exegesis in order to lay bare their ideological dimensions. This symbolic analysis in turn leads to some psychoanalytical hypotheses on the efficacy of ritual as a disciplinary procedure. The main theme which runs throughout the paper is that the natural and ethical components of ritual should be seen as formally related and complementary aspects of an ideology which serves the interests of those wielding power in the community. Those interests are those of the elders who control the labour of their junior kinswomen, and through them, their sons-in-law and brothers-in-law.

Resumen

Los Waiwai someten sus mujeres a un rito de iniciación: creen que la reclusión a la que ellas deben someterse tiene a la vez fuerza natural y moral. El propósito del rito es el de proteger a las muchachas de los estragos causados por la gente del anaconda (que son unos seres espirituales que viven en los ríos) y, al mismo tiempo, el de inculcar virtudes tales como la complacencia, la honradez, la obediencia y la laboriosidad. Esta contribución trata de responder a las preguntas de por qué y cómo se realiza el rito de iniciación. Para empezar, analizamos los factores que contribuyen a la alta valoración de que son objeto las mujeres en la comunidad y la posición que ellas ocupan en la estructura social como consecuencia de dicha valoración. Nuestro análisis tiene una orientación marxista y se inspira en parte en la obra de C. Meillassoux en torno a la importancia de la mujer como reproductora biológica en comunidades domésticas. Después de describir el rito de iniciación,

links up with incest when one considers that the spun cotton is presented to the initiand's father or brother to burn and rub into her body. Ash, and its links with the colour black, is undoubtedly symbolic of male creativity in Waiwai thought, as it is throughout South America. In *shodewika* festivals, where it is possible to trace a transformational link between cassava beer and menstrual blood, it is also possible to trace a link between tapioca drinks, also made by women, and semen. Men vomit up this mixture of beer and tapioca at the festivals, and the imagery of failed oral birth is an essential aspect of the ritual transition of the raider (anaconda?) into a man fit to marry into the community. George Mentore (personal communication) informs me that Waiwai men are very prone to draw an analogy between vomiting and ejaculation, and, were there space, it would be possible to glean many more details from the ethnography to corroborate these interpretations.

aplicamos técnicas estructuralistas al mito, rito y exégesis para así descubrir su alcance ideológico. Este análisis simbólico lleva a su vez a la consideración de algunas hipótesis psicoanalíticas que se refieren a la eficacia del rito como procedimiento disciplinario. El tema central de esta contribución es que los componentes naturales y éticos del rito deben considerarse como aspectos formalmente relacionados y complementarios de una ideología que sirve a los intereses de aquellas personas que ejercen el poder en la comunidad. Dichos intereses son los de los ancianos que controlan el trabajo de sus parientes más jóvenes y, a través de éstos, a sus yernos y cuñados.