GENDER, POWER, AND MOBILITY AMONG THE AWÁ-GUAJÁ (MARANHÃO, BRAZIL)

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The Awá (also known as Guajá) are hunter-gatherers whose way of life prior to their first contact with Brazilian society has been altered after relocation to a reservation. Basically, their mobility is reduced and they have been forced to start cultivation. Although these changes are beginning to affect women's social role, the traditional power relationships can still be inferred from the present conditions. The aim of this paper is twofold: (1) to argue that, in otherwise "egalitarian" societies, the differences in physical mobility involved in the complementary tasks carried out by men and women may account for gender inequality on the symbolic domain, given that mobility is a key factor in the construction of personhood in contexts of "relational," non-individualized identity; and (2) to check the validity of that assumption in the light of fieldwork data about gender relationships among the Awá-Guajá.

IT IS DIFFICULT TO ESTABLISH THE PRECISE MEANING OF *GENDER* and its theoretical content as a concept when applied to societies without an institutional framework of economic or political power. In contexts where positions of power are clearly differentiated, the category of gender obviously refers to just another power relationship—one among many, or perhaps the one upon which all the others are based (Scott 1986). This is not the case, however, when we are dealing with so-called egalitarian societies (Fried 1967:52), where functional divisions and work specialization are absent. Most scholars agree that in such societies, relationships between men and women can be defined in terms of "complementariness" (Rival 2007; Sanday 1981; Turner 1979), which does not necessarily entail a form of male power that involves the subordination of women. Some researchers have thus opted to replace concepts such as "equality" and "power" with others such as "sexual symmetry" and "asymmetry" (Sanday 1981:135) or "autonomy" (Leacock 1992).

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Within this broad theoretical framework, some scholars argue for the existence of truly egalitarian societies (e.g., Begler 1978; Flanagan 1989; Kent 1993; Leacock 1992; Lee 1982; Rival 2005, 2007; Zent 2006) whereas others (Ortner 1996; Rogers 1975; Sanday 1981) believe that men have always universally enjoyed "greater prestige and/or status, whether or not they exert dominance over women and whether or not women have a great deal of official or unofficial power" (Ortner 1996:141). According to this view, "prestige" should not be mistaken for "power," and researchers should therefore "always look at *both* the cultural ideology of 'prestige' and the on-the-ground practices of 'power' to understand gender relations in groups under study" (Ortner 1996:172).

At any rate, however, what may have caused the initial inequalities (whether they are understood in terms of prestige or power) remains open to discussion. Both materialist theorizations and those inspired by Lévi-Strauss's early structuralism resorted to the sexual division of labor and the appropriation of women by men to account for the basic conditions of social reproduction (see Bellier 1993 for a synthesis about groups from the Amazon region). Physiological differences between men and women were seen either as direct determinants of inequality (because of breast-feeding and child care) or as the basis for a cultural construct that legitimized male dominance by identifying men with culture and women with nature (Ortner 1972; see La Fontaine 1981 for a review of these claims). Men's higher prestige, according to Ortner and Whitehead (1981:18), would derive from the fact that "the sphere of social activity predominantly associated with males encompasses the sphere predominantly associated with females and is, for that reason, culturally accorded higher value." In the same line, Turner (1979) pointed out that, in groups with some degree of social inequality, such as the Gê and the Bororo, the impact of child care on the activities carried out by women led to a distribution of productive tasks which had "implications for the patterning of control": men were in charge of the group's external relations with other groups, which in turn gave them control of the internal activities and responsibilities associated with women within the group (Turner 1979:156).

Similar views on this issue have been formulated from different theoretical positions in recent years. For a number of scholars who have studied the horticulturalist and hunter-gatherer societies of lowland South America (Descola 2001; Fausto and Viveiros de Castro 1993; Gow 1989; MacCallum 1990; Rival 2005; Seymour-Smith 1991; Silva 2001; Vilaça 2002; Viveiros de Castro 1992:190–91), it is the association between men and affinity, on the one hand, and women and consanguinity, on the other, that explains inequalities in those societies; according to them, the category of gender itself loses its relevance, being subsumed within that of kinship as the principle structuring the social order (see Collier and Yanagisako 1987 on the gender/kinship debate). They argue that while the relationships articulated by women are consanguineal, those established by men are based on affinity; females deal with the insiderly world of known people and things while males deal with the outsiderly sphere of otherness, the alien, the unknown. Pushing all these arguments even further, Viveiros de Castro (2001) affirms that, contrary to Dumont's (1983a) view, "affinity is hierarchically superior to consanguinity" (Viveiros de Castro 2001:26). Although Viveiros does

not focus on gender, he nevertheless remarks—drawing on the data of Taylor (1983, 2000, 2001)—that among the Achuar "pure consanguinity seems only to be attainable by and among women, just as pure affinity is a male condition" (Viveiros de Castro 2001:34)—a view with which other scholars agree (Descola 2001; Taylor 2001; Vilaça 2002).

It seems to us that undoubtedly in all the above-mentioned groups men are in charge of all the tasks involving greater mobility and risk, which affords them greater opportunities for dealing with otherness and the alien, and encountering affines. That explains why, to some degree, male activities always encompass or affect those carried out by women. We do not believe, however, that such "hierarchical ordering" of activities can be mechanically derived from women's reproductive role (see Hernando 2010). We agree with Turner (1979:156–57) that although "the tendency for women to be charged with the responsibility for early child care . . . may doubtless be considered a basic infrastructural input" in male dominance, "this does not by itself dictate the social exclusion of women without children from male hunting, fishing and gathering tasks" (see also La Fontaine 1981); nor can such exclusion be explained, in our view, in terms of the socially constructed identification of women with nature and men with culture, for a dichotomy of that sort (nature vs. culture) makes no sense unless technology allows what our culture regards as "nonhuman nature" to be mechanically understood and controlled. Before that stage of technological development is reached, every aspect of reality is endowed with "human" behavior—that being the only explanatory model available—which makes it impossible to establish distinctions (not to mention hierarchies) between "nature" and "culture" in egalitarian societies (Descola 1996; Viveiros de Castro 1992:64–71, 1996).

Our aim in what follows is twofold: first, to present fieldwork data on gender relationships among the Awá (also known as Guajá), a group of hunter-gatherers from Maranhão, Brazil, who live in a reservation managed by that country's FUNAI (Fundação Nacional do Indio) government agency.[1] As we shall see, there doesn't seem to be a power differential in everyday interactions between Awá men and women, although males are accorded higher prestige on the culture's symbolic plane

Second, we put forward the hypothesis that gender differences at the symbolic level may be universal in "egalitarian" societies because they result from the social construction of male and female personhood, which in turn is partly determined by the different degrees of mobility involved in male and female tasks.

We begin by explaining our hypotheses in further detail and then turn to the empirical data.

GENDER AND MOBILITY IN "EGALITARIAN" SOCIETIES

Although a thorough, in-depth analysis of the origin and all the probable causes of gender inequality is beyond the scope of this paper, some limited hypotheses on this issue can be made here. Basically, we would like to put forward the idea that in so-called egalitarian societies such as the Awá-Guajá, *spatial mobility* might be the key factor that accounts for the disparity between male and female gender

identity and leads to a certain degree of inequality, initially expressed only in terms of prestige or status.

As cross-cultural anthropological studies show (Murdock 1967), in this type of society tasks don't seem to be universally regarded as being specifically male or female (although there are marked trends). The list of predominantly or solely masculine tasks is rather short, comprising either extremely dangerous activities such as the hunting of large sea mammals (exclusively masculine in all known groups) and land mammals (mostly masculine), or metallurgic work in societies having reached a certain level of socioeconomic complexity. Careful analysis of the gendered distribution of productive activities within each social group, however, systematically shows that men tend to be in charge of those tasks that involve greater danger and/or a higher degree of mobility. This fact might obviously be explained by motherhood, which—as we saw above—is generally alleged to be the source of inequality. But still, we do not believe this explanation can be applied mechanically to all situations, since, as Turner (1979:157) pointed out, in most such societies (and also among the Awá) women assist men in hunting, playing a very active and important role (see also Kent 1993:490; Politis 2007). And there are groups (e.g., Estioko-Griffin 1983; Storrie 1999:161; Zent 2006:3–5) among whom it is quite common for teenage or young adult women to go hunting on their own, although hunting remains prevalently—and normatively—a male activity. It is likewise not at all unusual in hunter-gatherer groups for gathering tasks to be shared by all—men, women, and children (Kent 1993; Kozák et al. 1979; Politis 2007; Zent 2006).

Understanding symbolic inequality in egalitarian societies requires, in our view, an analysis of the key factors shaping the sense of personhood in males and females. We agree with Conklin and Morgan (1996:659) that personhood cannot be reduced to essentialist categories or reductionist dichotomies such as Western "individualism" versus non-Western "sociocentrism" (or "relationality") (see also Spiro 1993). Personhood is "more an interactive process than a fixed location on a social grid" (Conklin and Morgan 1996:667). Personhood is as much shaped by social practices as it is expressed in those practices themselves. We believe the key to understanding gender differences along the course of history lies precisely in the fluid interplay between personhood and social practices. In between a "relational" and an "individualistic" sense of personhood lies a whole range of possible combinations—which we believe are not socially constructed in the same way for men and women within the same social group. In brief: as compared with female personhood, male personhood in premodern societies comprises a *higher proportion* of individualistic features.[2] This fact creates the social and subjective conditions for male dominance in nonegalitarian societies. Our assumption is that the slightly higher individualistic component of male personhood in so-called egalitarian societies is connected with the greater degree of mobility inherent to masculine tasks within the gendered distribution of productive activities, which is in turn mainly aimed at protecting vulnerable, fragile human offspring. In principle, these differences do not involve relationships of power or dominance, but they lay the grounds for the future development of male supremacy when functional divisions increase within the group (Hernando 2000, 2002, 2008).

Neotenic changes in the evolution of genus *Homo* resulted in a longer development period and, consequently, a longer period of immaturity and dependency during a human child's growth, as compared with other primate species (Bermúdez de Castro and Domínguez Rodrigo 1992; Thompson et al. 2003). The extreme vulnerability of their offspring, practically unparalleled in nature, forces humans into highly cooperative forms of social organization adapted to the requirements of child care, which is particularly intensive—in comparison with most other species—during an infant's first year of life. In such conditions, mobility may be seen to endanger mothers as well as their children, which might explain why functional divisions within hunter-gatherer groups are based on gender complementariness, and the activities normatively assigned to women tend to be those involving less risk and/or lower mobility (though they may occasionally carry out other, more dangerous tasks).

Without going into issues beyond the scope of this paper, we may briefly point out that in oral societies the size and the limits of one's world are determined by how far one can travel, since human activities themselves are the principle structuring time and space (Thornton 1980; Bourdieu 1990). Only those physical areas the group or some of its members have actually seen, roamed about, or traveled through, are spatially ordered into a "world": without writing or maps, unseen and unheard-of regions simply do not exist, are not part of (what is taken to be) reality. Societies where the only functional divisions are those determined by gender also tend to be characterized by other important features: namely, the lack of scientific models capable of explaining the world on mechanistic principles, and a level of technology that does not afford mastery over natural phenomena. Lack of control over nonhuman nature, combined with behavioral homogeneity within each gender, result in a relational or interdependent construction of personhood (Bird-David 1999; Fowler 2005; Markus and Kitayama 1991; Strathern 1988) that makes each member of the group feel safer and stronger as part of a bigger whole, faced with the challenge of a hostile world that cannot be changed.

In such conditions, gendered differences in mobility mean gendered differences in the shape and size of one's world. This is all the more crucial given the fact that, as the world a person inhabits increases in size and complexity—with ever more varied phenomena unfolding all the time—so does the need for versatile decision-making and self-assertiveness. Consequently, although it can be safely assumed that in the societies with which we are dealing both male and female personhood are constructed relationally rather than individually, still it seems quite clear that activities involving greater mobility will confer upon those who predominantly carry them out a certain advantage when it comes to dealing with otherness, the unknown, outsiders, and affines. This, in turn, makes possible the emotional detachment that is required for the true exercise of *power* (Elias 1987), which can be understood as "an expression for an especially large social opportunity to influence the self-regulation and the fate of other people" (Elías 1991:52).

Greater mobility would thus result in a slightly greater component of autonomy in the construction of male personhood in these otherwise "egalitarian" societies, and conversely, comparatively lower mobility—rather than motherhood

or childcare per se—would account for the slightly greater element of relationality in female selves. That explains why, under conditions of modernity, when motherhood no longer places constraints on women's mobility—and they use writing systems and maps to represent space—their individuality and their access to power may develop in the same terms as men's (though this may come at a high price for many women, owing to the dominant system of gender relationships [Hernando 2008]).

We shall now analyze gender relationships among the Awá-Guajá from Maranhão, Brazil, in order to (1) assess the impact of mobility on them and (2) make a contribution to the debate on universalism versus the possibility of complete gender equality in egalitarian societies.

THE AWÁ (GUAJÁ) FROM MARANHÃO (BRAZIL)

The group call themselves the Awá, although they are also referred to as Guajá in the literature (e.g., Baleé 1994; Cormier 2003a; Forline 1997; Gomes 1991), because the term *Awá* is a Tupi-Guarani cognate that has also been used as an autonym by a number of peoples. They are a group of hunter-gatherers in transition to agriculture, living in a seasonally dry tropical forest area (Forline 1997:84) of the state of Maranhão (Brazil), on the eastern flanks of the Brazilian Amazon region (Figure 1). Nimuendaju included them in the 1949 *Handbook of South American Indians*, and since then, two excellent monographs have focused on them (Cormier 2003a; Forline 1997). Their subsistence is based on hunting, fishing, and gathering, although in recent years their diet has been incorporating other types food, which—though initially produced for them by the FUNAI agency—they are now increasingly having to cultivate by themselves. Many traditional elements of their material culture remain, however: ornaments, dwelling structures, weapons, hunting instruments, etc. (Galvão 1979:220; Gomes and Meirelles 2002:1; O'Dwyer 2002). Since the early 1970s they have been suffering the consequences of deforestation as well as harassment from peasants and representatives of modern Brazilian society (Treece 1987), which explains why as of 1973 Brazil's government, through its FUNAI agency, started removing them from their traditional lands and relocating them to legally demarcated reservations. The FUNAI employees in charge of protecting them live in each of those areas in so-called Indian outposts (*posto indígena,* or PI). Close to 315 Awá currently live in four of these PI enclaves (Guajá, Awá, Tiracambú, and Jurití, located in three reserves or *terras indígenas*), and an undetermined number of uncontacted Awá are still living in nearby areas (and in *terra indígena* Arariboia). Our team's fieldwork was carried out at Jurití, located in the Awá Reserve, and therefore all the data we provide here refer to that particular site. The other outposts were only briefly visited, except for Tiracambú, where the team's linguist spent several weeks (Silva Santana 2008).

We carried out 23 weeks of fieldwork at Jurití, distributed intermittently in periods of four weeks between December 2005 and March 2009, which covered the group's activities during both the dry and the rainy seasons. The team comprised six researchers from different fields (anthropology, ethnoarchaeology,

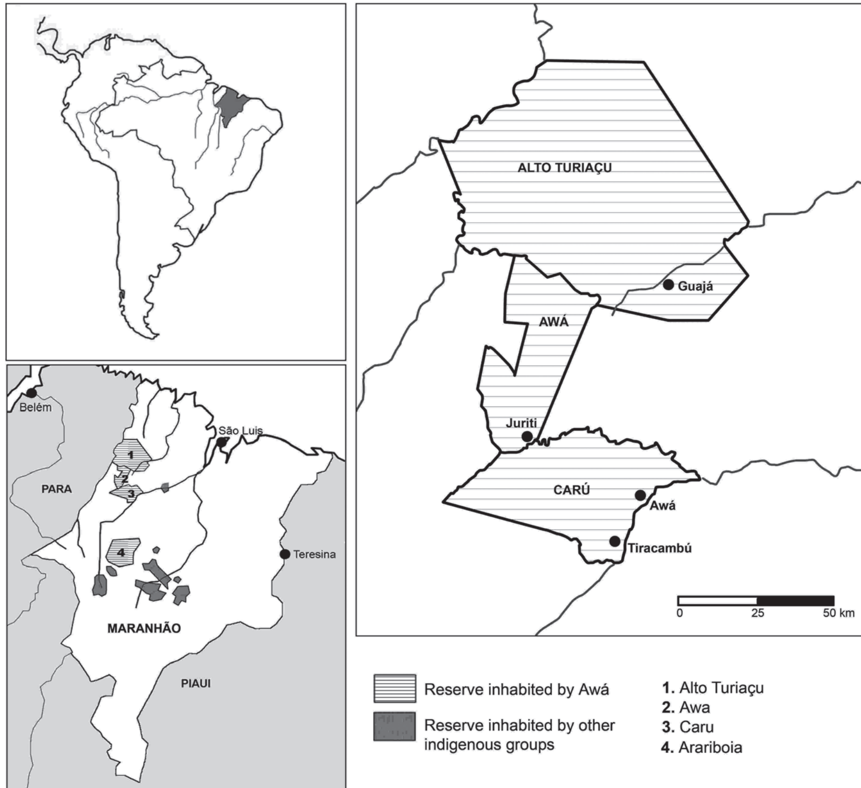

Figure 1. Map showing the location of the Awá in Brazil.

linguistics, and biology), but only two were present at the outpost during each period. This was meant to reduce the invasiveness of our presence, given the small number of Awá at Jurití—only 40 people. Besides, two researchers sufficed to carry out participant observation of the Awá's daily activities, which were basically of two types: work at the village that had grown next to the outpost and foraging trips. Thus, the discontinuous nature of the observation periods was more than compensated for by their intensiveness. Linguist Antonio Silva Santana, a fluent speaker of the Awá language, studied its semantics and syntax in detail and acted as interpreter. Biologist Maximiliano Lincoln Soares Siquiera documented the area's resources and their use by the Awá. The other members of the team processed the quantitative data into tables showing

1. Each adult Awá's activity during a regular workday (from morning to evening).
2. Which resources were obtained and consumed each day, how they were distributed, and where they were processed.
3. Number and gender of participants, distance covered, and resources obtained in foraging trips.

4. Objects allocated to people according to age and gender.

Qualitative information was gathered as well, especially on gender issues such as decision-making concerning the distribution of food, the itinerary of hunting sorties, or permissions for our team to accompany them in those sorties.

To understand gender relationships among the Awá-Guajá we must first take into account the fact that the group has undergone changes forced on them from the outside by processes of colonial domination, which means that currently observable conditions in no way represent those in original hunter-gatherer groups.

To begin with, most researchers agree that possibly until about 300 years ago the Awá may have been horticulturist, or there may at least have been a horticultural component in their subsistence system (e.g., Balée 1994; Cormier 2003a; Forline 1997; Gomes and Meirelles 2002; O'Dwyer 2002). According to the most widely supported hypothesis (Balée 1994:209–10), they may have been forced to resort to hunting, gathering, and fishing in order to escape the successive waves of colonization invading the western area of what is now the state of Pará, where the Awá probably originated. Other groups of hunter-gatherers in South America are hypothesized to have undergone the same process (for a discussion see Politis 2007:327–29; Rival 1999). The Awá we have been studying are contemporary hunter-gatherers in contact with a modern nation-state, which probably results in quite significant differences between their social dynamic and that of primeval hunter-gatherer groups at the beginning of their historical trajectory.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF RELOCATION

Relocation to the Indian outposts has had a dramatic impact on the organization of the Awá's traditional way of life, which was based on small bands composed of a few families with a high degree of territorial mobility. Contact with outsiders and the subsequent relocation to the outposts were always triggered by traumatic experiences, since the FUNAI agency would only relocate the Awá upon receiving reports about sightings of indigenous people that seemed to be isolated or lost as a result of the gradual settling of the land by an ever-expanding peasant population. In fact, contact itself turned out to be lethal. More than half of those who were contacted are estimated to have died as a result of diseases transmitted through contact itself (Forline 1997:19; Gomes and Meirelles 2002).

As a consequence, the Awá's mobility patterns were radically altered at the beginning of their new life at the outposts. For a start, the painful experiences they had been through led them to seek the protection of FUNAI representatives, and that meant restricting their movements and establishing permanent settlements near the outposts. The FUNAI on their part would press them not to leave the vicinity of the outposts for their own protection. As a result of this process, even though some families may still set up temporary camps outside the outpost's control area—following patterns consistent with what Binford (1980) defined as "logistic mobility"—most of the Awá live permanently in hamlets near the protection outposts. This is in turn reinforced in a feedback loop by FUNAI's decision to teach the Awá agricultural techniques to help them replace the

carbohydrates they formerly obtained from gathered resources (mainly babaçu coconut [*Orbignya/Attalea speciosa*] and the fruits of the bacaba, a palm native to the Amazon rain forest [*Oenocarpus bacaba*]). In sum, contact with outsiders reduced Awá mobility, and then FUNAI's introduction of agriculture definitively consolidated and reinforced that situation. That is not, however, the only impact agriculture has had on Awá society, since it also seems to be altering the gendered distribution of workload, and gender relationships as well.

As has been pointed out by many scholars (Begler 1978:576–77; Brown 1970; Buenaventura-Posso and Brown 1980; Flanagan 1989:259; Forline 1995:61–62; Seymour-Smith 1991:639, 644), interethnic contact has often resulted in a decrease in women's influence within their own groups, or even in the emergence of leaders who embraced the values of modern society at the expense of their own traditions (Etienne and Leacock 1980; Leacock and Lee 1982; Lee 1982:50–51; Stearman 1989). Owing to the logic of Western society, its representatives in many contact situations (reservation guards, priests, ethnologists, linguists, adventurers, etc.) have traditionally been patriarchally minded males who considered other males as their sole valid interlocutors. Thus the Westerners' interaction with the indigenous group created or reinforced gender differences that may not have existed before (or not in that degree). Not only are many of the accounts supported by allegedly objective observations in fact biased, they also reflect behavior and relationships conditioned by the Western researcher's very presence (Flanagan 1989:252).

Reenacting yet again this sort of dynamic, FUNAI employees at Jurití are involved in a rather unequal, paternalistic relationship with the Awá (see also Forline 1995, 1997). FUNAI employees always choose males as representatives of the whole of the Awá, ignoring certain women who still have a highly respected status within the group. The Awá themselves may be partly responsible for this situation, since relating with affines was traditionally a male responsibility among them (Hernando 2010). Perhaps, as we shall see below, even prior to contact Awá society may have developed some slight gender imbalance, at least on the symbolic plane, but the fact is that the male-dominated bias in the interactions with the people who have the power to protect them is reinforcing inequality: when it comes to receiving certain supplies or transmitting orders or discussing issues, only men are called.

There is, moreover, another circumstance that might be further reinforcing gender inequalities among the Awá. Although, as was mentioned above, the Awá's mobility was greatly reduced after their relocation to the FUNAI outposts, they are nevertheless supposed to be able to roam freely within the area of indigenous land that is under the outpost's surveillance, but the truth is in actual fact they don't. That is because, to begin with, illegal loggers regularly invade their land at the start of the dry season, building roads and damming rivers, which obviously scares away game and suspends the availability of fishing resources and would in itself suffice to account for the impossibility of actually moving across all of the territory the Awá were assigned in principle (González Ruibal and Hernando 2010). But on top of that, FUNAI employees are constantly urging them not wander away from the outposts, the better to keep their movements under surveillance in order to protect them. As a result, the Awá are actually

circumscribed to a hunting area with a radius of approximately 10 km around Jurití. This drastic reduction of their mobility is having a considerable impact on their traditional activities, and consequently—we may assume—on the social and economic status of men and women within the group.

Ironically, however, the reduction of the Awá's mobility seems to be having a greater impact on traditionally female activities than on male ones. This may seem illogical, given that men's most important activity is hunting, which requires more mobility than gathering (traditionally ascribed to women). The reason for this apparent paradox is twofold:

In the first place, hunting is for the Awá the activity around which all of traditional life revolves (see also Zent 2006 for the Hotï, Viveiros de Castro 1992:43 for the Araweté, or Rival 2002 for the Huaroni). It is the axis structuring life, conversations, the balance of reciprocity, personal relationships, etc. This means that giving up hunting would bring about a profound and significant transformation of the whole basis for their culture, and that is why the Awá still cling to it. Most of the Awá still believe "being Awá" means "being a hunter." In addition, hunting is the source of certain nutrients, such as high-quality protein, which groups such as the Awá cannot obtain exclusively from vegetables (Beckerman 1994; Lee 1982:41; Sponsel 1986). The amount of time and effort men put into making bows and arrows—from selecting the types of wood that serve as raw material and obtaining feathers to straightening the wood by fire—is quite remarkable. For those (normally young men) who have replaced bows and arrows with shotguns, meticulous care of the firearm replicates the attention formerly paid to arrows: they clean the guns again and again, they check the ammunition and the powder, and so on. Without doubt, hunting is the Awá's main activity, the locus whereby the whole of their culture is actualized: from their knowledge and their relationships with everything that surrounds them to their social bonds, their beliefs, and their way of understanding the world.

Second, in psychological and social terms, gathering does not evoke the same sort of highly valued symbolic associations with struggle, conflict, adventure, and death that hunting elicits. It also has a lesser economic importance since most products can be substituted or at least complemented by those obtained through cultivation of the crops imposed by FUNAI, which is also giving the Awá Western clothes, cotton hammocks, and colored fabrics employed by the women to make skirts or carry their infant children. This means that many of the objects the Awá used to elaborate out of the raw materials they had gathered by themselves are now being replaced by industrially manufactured products with a similar purpose, and consequently, though the whole group (regardless of age or gender) still participates in collecting vegetables for consumption, women's specific work at gathering fibers for the manufacture of hammocks, skirts, wristbands, etc., is becoming redundant.

Given this situation, and the fact that males devote most of their time and efforts to hunting and hunting-related activities (arrow-making, meat processing), it might have been a reasonable option, given the agency's overall plan, to teach Awá women to cultivate the rice and manioc crops they are trying to introduce. And yet, in accordance with their patriarchal bias, so typical of Brazilian

peasantry, FUNAI agents only teach cultivation to men, even at the price of overloading them with chores and emptying the women's economic role of all content. Another female activity that may have been lost is the transportation of household belongings during residential moves, of which women are typically in charge in many societies (for the Nukak, see Politis 2007:168–69; for the Sirionó, see Holmberg 1969; for the Héta, see Kozák et al. 1979).

The all-male FUNAI crew at the Jurití outpost live by themselves, while their wives remain in their home towns looking after their children. FUNAI men take 10 days' home leave for every 20 days of work. When they are at the outpost, they carry out the domestic chores their wives would normally do at home, such as washing and mending clothes, preparing food, etc. Hence, for Awá men that behavior does not seem strange and they imitate it, to the point that both Awá men and women wash and mend their own clothes, just as the FUNAI men—and sometimes the women from the FUNASA (Brazilian Government's health care service)—do at the outpost.

Awá males can thus be seen to be doing more and more work, while the females do less and less. Men hunt howler monkeys (*Alouatta beelzebul*), tapirs (*Tapirus terrestris*), peccary (*Tayassu* sp.), coati (*Dasyprocta* sp.), paca (*Agouti paca*), deer (*Mazama* sp.), or caiman (*Melanosuchus niger*); they obtain turtles that serve as food reserves; they fish—sometimes even electric eels, which they shoot with bows and arrows. It is the men who grow the rice and do the grinding and winnowing; they grow manioc as well, and they take it to the mill where they carry out the whole process of pressing and toasting that's required for making manioc flour, which is at present the group's main source of carbohydrates. The men fell trees to obtain honey (which quite often the women voraciously eat first); they process the game they hunt and cook the food; they build the dwellings; they make hunting and fishing implements and also their own ornaments. As was mentioned above, they even wash or mend their clothes (and sometimes their wives' as well). Meanwhile, Awá women mostly spend their time sitting on their hammocks, caring for the little children, chatting, and occasionally fishing or hunting small birds near their houses in the company of their children.

Nevertheless, as is the case in similar groups (Kent 1993; Politis 2007; Rival 1996; Zent 2006), the women's assistance is essential for hunting; women frequently accompany their male partners to help them scare howling monkeys (*Alouatta belzebul*) out of the trees by shouting and clapping their hands; from the ground, women keep track of the monkeys as they jump from one tree to another, which gives the hunters time to climb down the trees and then climb up other trees to surround their prey. At times the women accompany the men simply for the sheer pleasure of sharing in the hunt, waiting at a meeting point for the men to return, or helping them track game on the ground. On the whole, though, the situation may appear to be one of female dominance: prima facie, an outside observer might say that the men are in charge of obtaining everything the women are then going to consume later on.

As a matter of fact, some women's views (such as Ayrúa or Parachĩ) do carry an enormous weight on the group's decision-making. Others, however, are more passive, less conspicuous, more unwilling to take part in male activities. The same

happens with men: some go hunting very often; they are always active, always contributing to the welfare of the community—while others are passive and shun responsibility, as in the case of Yucha'a. The range of variation is quite wide in both genders, and it is really striking how much each person's particularity is respected by the others—as long as the distribution of chores is perceived as fair. Each helps the group according to their capabilities (see also Rival 2002:102 on the Huaorani from Ecuador). No particular abilities or personal characteristics give anyone power over the others because all know that belonging to the group, and the bond with the others, are key to everyone's survival (Hernando 2002).

Males make decisions and face challenges in contexts of open conflict with outside threats—such as invaders or loggers. However, in the absence of danger, or when dealing with issues that are wholly internal to the group, women play an active role in decision-making. They may want a piece of the food another family has obtained, or they may have their husbands go out in search of some specific resource, and they are the ones who would decide, for instance, if our team could accompany them in the group's hunting sorties, or whether we could share their food.

We believe that the present situation of gender equality among the Awá is not consistent with the unbalanced distribution of functions. As has been pointed out by other researchers (see Leacock 1992 or Kent 1993), the situation of (at least apparent) equality will not last unless the women make a significant functional or economic contribution to the group, or unless they control production or the exchange of goods. Given that none of this is happening at the moment among the Awá, we may infer that perhaps it did happen in the past, and hence the relative equality that is still preserved today. This hypothesis might be supported by the available information on other Tupí-Guaraní groups of hunter-gatherers and hunter-agriculturalists, such as the Sirionó from Bolivia (Balée 1999; Califano 1999; Holmberg 1969) or, in Brazil, the Héta from the Upper Paraná (Kozák et al. 1979) and the Araweté from the Xingú River (Viveiros de Castro 1992). All these examples support the idea that among Tupi-Guaraní hunter-gatherers the women's workload must have been much bigger in the past; female tasks were probably complementary to those carried out by males, and quite as numerous.

The above inference is confirmed by Americhá's case. Though her exact age is unknown to us, and a precise estimate is rather difficult, the FUNAI outpost guard believes her to be around 90, and she is the oldest woman at Jurití. She has great-grandchildren living with the group. As we have been able to witness, Americhá still does much of the work that Holmberg (1969) recorded among Sirionó women, and Kozák et al. (1979) among the Héta (both also Tupí-Guaraní groups, very similar to the Awá). Americhá carries water and wood for the fire, collects *tucúm* fiber (*Astrocaryum vulgare*), dries it in front of the fire, and winds it into balls that she uses for weaving and mending her own hammock and the skirt she wears. Americhá is active all the time; she goes to and fro with fibers for weaving, as well as her own resin for lighting, or palm branches to repair or enlarge her dwelling. She goes on solo trips in search of raw materials, walking nonstop in round trips of up to 9.2 km, as we have had the opportunity of witnessing. The younger women in the group do nothing comparable.

In light of all this, we can state that among the Awá, men still do most of the activities they did prior to contact—with which they identify, and from which they derive self-esteem—plus new ones connected with agriculture, with which they do not identify, while women have lost most of their areas of competence except for one—reproduction. That may be why women's reproductive role among the Awá has been endowed with a higher value than it probably had in the past, perhaps as compensation for the loss of other practical responsibilities, and the self-esteem and status they provided.

MOTHERHOOD AMONG THE AWÁ

As mentioned above, motherhood and childcare play a central role in the lives of Awá women. They seldom separate from their little children, whom they breast-feed until the age of two or three. They hold and carry infants around all the time, propped up against their hips and wrapped up in the *chirú* (sling), even when they have to walk long distances to accompany the men on their hunting trips. Also, as is common among many other groups (Fausto 1999; Hill and Hawkes 1983; Kosák et al. 1979:423; Politis 2007; Rival 2002:98; Smole 1976; Werner 1984; Zent 2006:13–14), the Awá adopt many different animals as pets, including agouti (*Dasyprocta* sp.), squirrels (*Sciurus aestuans*), and coati (*Nasua nasua*). But they mostly prefer monkeys, such as howler (*Alouatta belzebul*), squirrel (*Saimiri sciureus*), or some of the capuchin types (*Cebus apella, C. kaapori, C. olivaceus*), although any of the species identified in the area can also be adopted: for example, *Aotus infulatus* (Kuhl's night monkey), *Chiropotes satanas* (black-bearded sakí), and *Saguinus midas* (or tamarin) (Cormier 2006).

Different functions—which we cannot discuss here owing to limitations of space—have been attributed to the adoption of pets in the Amazon region (Cormier 2003b; Descola 1994, 1998; Erikson 2000; Fausto 1999; Taylor 2001; Zent 2006). Breast-feeding of pets has been interpreted by Cormier (2003a:114) as enhancing "the culturally valued image of the fertile female." The above-mentioned vanishing of traditional female tasks and areas of competence may explain, at least in part, Awá women's almost full-time dedication to their children and pets. But the heightened relevance of reproduction in a context of depopulation cannot be overlooked, either. Many lowland groups see the "production" of children (from intercourse to breast-feeding to initiations) as a form of work since "social identities are physiologically constituted" (Conklin and Morgan 1996:669; Turner 1995).

Producing new children is seen as a social function involving obligations for both men and women. The Awá talk about "making" a child (*mymyra japo*) with the same verb they employ to refer to "making a necklace" (*py'yra japo*), conveying in both cases the element of conscious, detailed work entailed by both activities. In most lowland societies, reproduction is believed to require the participation of both genders, combining male sperm with a female contribution that may range from simple container hosting the fetus among the Awá (Comier 2003a:64–65, 2003c: n. 8; Forline 1997:168) or the Araweté (Viveiros de Castro 1992:179) to menstrual blood among the Enawene-Nawe (Silva 2001:52), Huaorani (Rival

2007), Bororo (Viertler 1979:22), and Wari (Conklin and Morgan 1996:669) or milk, which the Kayapó (Turner 1995:159) and the Matis (Erikson 2002:127) believe is retained within the mother's body during pregnancy.

The growing importance of motherhood (constantly reenacted through pet adoption) among Awá women may derive from its increasing relevance as a form of work for the group, made possible by the availability of time and energies resulting from the vanishing of other social roles. This may also explain the continuity of gender equality even when women's economic functions are mostly disappearing (see Turner 1979). The problem is that this rearrangement of the gendered distribution of activities is increasing the specialization and diversification of male tasks while reducing women's mobility even more. Although gender relationships among the Awá may be egalitarian at present, we have reason to believe the balance of power may change in the future, as men finally take over all dealings with affines (Descola 2001; Viveiros de Castro 2001), thereby encompassing and determining female consanguineal activities (see also Turner 1979 on hierarchical complementarity). Our hypothesis is that the process will lead to male and female personhood gradually diverging in terms of individuality and power. This prognosis is consistent with the impact that contact with FUNAI is already having on current gender relationships among the Awá, pushing them into the functional complementariness that defines patriarchal order: males as hunters/gatherers/agriculturalists versus females as mothers (as opposed to males being mostly hunters and partly gatherers, and women being mostly gatherers and partly hunters—as well as mothers).

In what follows, however, we would like to evaluate what gender relationships in Awá society may have been like prior to such transformations.

SOME INFERENCES ON PRECONTACT GENDER RELATIONSHIPS AMONG THE AWÁ

The Awá's peculiar historical trajectory must be taken into account. If the group started out as an agricultural society (Balée 1994:209–10), we may then deduce that their culture derives from precedents that were quite different from what is usually regarded as a completely "egalitarian" society, and some symbolic traces of them may remain today. The fact is that, as Cormier (2003b:85, 2003c:136) points out, gender hierarchy, albeit of a weak and complex sort, does indeed exist. It must be emphasized, however, that Awá society tends to be egalitarian: there are no inequalities in relationships within the same gender—and particularly within the same age group; no people or subgroups (not even shamans) exhibit differentiated power status, and there is no warfare. Cooperation and generalized reciprocity are held in high regard, and conflicts are avoided through constant joking (Cormier 2003b:83; Forline 1997). Gender inequality is difficult to observe in Awá daily life, and particularly in their sex life—as we shall explain in full detail below—but it is nevertheless expressed at the symbolic levels of culture, as proven by the following facts:

First, Awá is a Tupi-Guarani cognate that best translates as either "human" or "male," in the same way as the terms "men" and "mankind" are (or used to be)

employed in English as generic designations for "people" or "human beings." "Awá" contrasts with "woman" (*kunya*). The language shows historically, therefore, a male bias among Tupi-Guarani speakers and among Awá-Guajá in particular.

Second, in the current situation, with their culture in transition to agriculture, it is hunting—as was discussed above—that structures practically as well as cognitively all of Awá life. It is a predominantly male activity, from which we may infer that this was also the case prior to contact—and that means in turn that the males' main activity was always more highly regarded socially than any of the activities the women carry out.[3]

Third, as is common in most of the hunter-gatherer societies regarded to be "egalitarian" (Begler 1978:585; Harrison 1985), the Awá have exclusively male ceremonies: in other words, the symbolic world seems to reflect gender hierarchies. The Awá believe in *iwa,* a mythical place where ancestors and spirits dwell. When the Awá want to contact them, they perform a ceremony called *karawára,* in which only men can participate in the main roles (Forline 1997:205; Cormier 2003c:136). The ceremony takes place inside a *takaya,* a circular structure built with large palm leaves, where men take turns singing and dancing individually, with a rhythm that grows and grows in intensity until they "take flight toward the heavenly spiritual realm" (Forline 1997:201). Women are not allowed to take part since they are deemed incapable of reaching the *iwa* (mobility defines this exclusively masculine rite from which women are barred). If they want to contact their own ancestors, women must ask their husbands or male relatives to transmit their messages and act as emissaries (Cormier 2003c:136). Women's sole function in the ceremony is to serve as specialized assistants, decorating men's bodies and singing outside the *takaya,* to help increase the rhythm of their husbands' chants and thus enable them to "take flight."

Fourth, differences in mobility are also implied in their perception of male and female dreams. According to Cormier (2003c:136), men's dreams are interpreted as part of their flight to the *iwa* spirit-world, whereas women's dreams are dismissed as passive experiences. The *hatikwayta* may be seen as "a manifestation of both the spiritual self and the remembered images of others" (2003c:128); it is a multiplicity formed by the subject's relational memories of himself and other members of the group. That is why *hatikwayta* do not exist outside memory and have no fixed objective form; each person "sees" different images (2003c:128). Men's dreams are thought to show what occurs during the *hatikwayta*'s flight to *iwa*, as seen in the men's own experience; women's dreams, by contrast, are believed to result from possession by a deity, or to show what they see through the eyes of one of their *iwa hatikwayta* alters (2003c:136).

Fifth, although motherhood and childcare are Awá women's two main tasks, on the discursive level females are not regarded as agents of procreation. The Awá believe that fetuses develop from the accumulation of sperm, which means men are seed-makers and women mere "containers" for that seed (Cormier 2003a:64–65, 2003c: n. 8; Forline 1997:168). In other words, men are granted the active role, while women are downgraded to the role of passive vessels (see also Viveiros de Castro 1992:179 for the Araweté or Erikson 2002:127 for the Matis). Since the

fetus will only develop from the accumulation of semen, it follows that women are almost obliged to engage in frequent sexual intercourse during pregnancy. This explains the phenomenon of "multiple paternity" or "partible paternity," common in other societies in the Amazon region (Erikson 2002; Forline 1997:168; Rival 2007; Shapiro 2009; Viveiros de Castro 1992:180).

Sixth, girls as young as six or seven, or sometimes even younger,[4] can be given away in marriage to adult men by their fathers or brothers (Cormier 2003a:68). These arranged unions function as a father-child relationship until the girl reaches puberty, whereupon she becomes the man's wife. As a matter of fact, Awá women use consanguineal terms to refer to affines: they call their husbands *chipa'i,* derived from the word for "father" (*chipa*) plus a diminutive suffix (*'i*), meaning something akin to "little daddy" (Cormier 2003a:79). As the girls grow up, they gradually regard themselves as the hunters' "wives" and assert their status in the group on that basis. Once the woman has fulfilled her engagement as wife to her first husband, she may then change husbands as often as she likes, freely choosing from among the males in the group. However, it is not clear whether relationships worked that way prior to contact. For Wagley (1974:376), the current situation is a consequence of the demographic catastrophe resulting from contact, and the fact is that at present there are fewer women than men at Jurití, a factor which may have generated a new social dynamic.

Except for the marriage of young girls, the above-described inequalities at the level of symbolic discourse are not enacted on the practical level. In fact, Awá women enjoy a great deal of freedom when it comes to choosing sexual partners to complement their relationship with their husbands, not only during pregnancy, but throughout life. Referring to the Ramko'kamekra (Canela), Crocker (1974) remarked that extramarital sex might function as a "social lubricant" (Forline 1997:172) since sexual relationships always entail social commitment. In addition to allowing extramarital sex, Awá society also accepts polyandry. It is not a social norm, it depends on the proportion of men to women at any given time, much like the above-mentioned marriages between adults and boys or girls. If there are fewer women than men in a group (as is the case at the Jurití and Guajá outposts), a woman may have two husbands (Forline 1997:173).[5] The converse phenomenon (polygamy) may also occur when the proportions are balanced or reversed, as we saw above (Cormier 2003a:65; Forline 1997:67). Awá women also feel completely free to abort unwanted pregnancies. Abortion is felt to be so legitimate that young women discuss it openly.

As can be deduced from all the above, the Awá appear to be rather contradictory: the gender hierarchies implicit in the symbolic realm do not seem to have a manifest effect on their daily activities.

We know next to nothing about the Awá's political context prior to contact: how their meetings at the *cocais* (plots where *coco babaçu* palm trees grow) were conducted, how their marriages were arranged, how their journeys through the land were decided, how their relationships with non-Awá groups were managed. Even if the scales of power were weighted in favor of men, the imbalance must have been rather slight, since it didn't seem to involve any actual dominance of men over women, nor differences in decision-making or access to resources. It

seems clear that in societies with a low level of socioeconomic complexity gender inequalities in the symbolic domain do not necessarily materialize into female subordination in the economic order.

CONCLUSIONS

The data discussed here seem to indicate that among the Awá subtle gender asymmetries are operative in the symbolic order—at the level of what Ortner (1996) called "prestige"—without a direct translation into male dominance over females. Symbolic prevalence does not afford practical advantages to Awá men in daily life, and the fact is that Awá women enjoy privileges that allow them to live quite relaxed lives. Male and female personhood differ slightly from one another in Awá society, but we conclude that such difference is not socioeconomically determined by an unequal distribution of power; its origin must lie elsewhere, in the construction of personhood.

The self-perception of men and women in so-called egalitarian societies is enmeshed in a complex network of intragroup relationships that has been variously termed "interdependent" or "relational" (Bird-David 1999; Fowler 2005; Markus and Kitayama 1991; Strathern 1988). This mode of self-identity is closely linked to known spaces charged with emotional meaning and crisscrossed by the panoply of phenomena that constitute the world of everyday life. We believe that gendered differences in mobility may have an impact on the construction of male and female personhood that has not been sufficiently studied so far. Field observation suggests that such differences might be correlated with symbolic hierarchies in terms of "prestige," though they do not necessarily entail social or economic asymmetries.

Male and female activities in "egalitarian" societies are complementary. The difference is determined, basically, by the need to avoid exposing women to dangerous tasks that might harm their infant children, who are extremely vulnerable and completely dependent on mother care. Women can work as hard as men (Americhá is living proof among the Awá), but they take fewer risks, and that small disparity has a huge impact in the construction of the personhood because greater risk and higher mobility enhance a person's sense of individuality, autonomy, and independence from the social group to which they belong. A certain measure of emotional detachment is a cognitive prerequisite for individuality and the exercise of power (Elias 1987).

This process might be connected with the link between affinity and men on the one hand and consanguinity and women on the other—a dichotomy that some scholars in recent years believe to be the origin of gender differences. It is not because of some sort of universal, genetically based principle that males tend to deal with affines much more than females do (Hernando 2010), but rather because there is a slightly stronger individualistic component in the construction of masculine personhood, which—we must insist—derives from the higher levels of risk and mobility involved in the activities they carry out, rather than the other way around. Men are not more mobile because they deal with affinity by virtue of some universal rule; they deal with affinity because they are more mobile to begin with.

Despite the Awá's current state of transition to new cultural forms, close observation of their social life allows us to put forward the following conclusions:

1. Prior to contact, gender relationships among them must have been egalitarian in socioeconomic terms, though asymmetric at the symbolic level.
2. Gendered activities, though complementary, have always been characterized by different degrees of mobility.
3. Those differences are increasing at the moment, as men continue to hunt while women's role is reduced to reproduction.

Hunting as a form of "resistance" to the imposition of agriculture and peasant life may paradoxically reinforce the divergence in the construction of male and female personhood in ways that are cognitively consistent with the emergence of male dominance—a future development that FUNAI influence may accelerate. The origin of the whole process, however, was not mechanically dictated by Awá women's adscription to a reproductive role, but rather by the fact that motherhood limited their ability to perform activities requiring greater mobility, and that had a decisive impact on the construction of gendered social identities.

NOTES

1. The research Project "Ethnoarchaeology of the Awá (Guajá), Maranhão, Brazil: A Group of Hunter-gatherers in Transition to Agriculture" was financed by Spain's Ministry for Education and Science (HUM2006-06276). Although our initial goals were ethnoarchaeological, as the project unfolded we felt the need to address broader anthropological issues such as those approached in this article. A shorter and simpler version of this article was published in Spanish in 2008 in the journal *Arenal* (vol. 15, Granada), with the title "Género y poder entre los Awá (Maranhão, Brasil): Utilidad de la etnoarqueología para una reflexión sobre las representaciones del pasado." We would like to express our gratitude to the *Fundação Nacional do Índio* and the *Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico* for permission to carry out fieldwork; to the Awá, for their patience, generosity, and hospitality; to Louis Carlos Forline, Laura Rival and Sandra Montón, for reviewing this paper and providing valuable comments and criticism; and finally to the four anonymous *JAR* reviewers and the Editor, whose comments were of great help in improving the text. Whatever errors may be found here are, of course, solely our responsibility.

2. We are not referring here to that type of individuality initially studied by Dumont (1983b) in the context of Indian asceticism, which requires isolation or differentiation from society and an intensive connection to mysticism and the sacred in order to develop (producing "individuals-outside-the-world," as he called them). This is the kind of individuality that may perhaps shape the personhood of shamans and witches. We refer exclusively to the type of individuality whose construction—in most cultural contexts—is precisely based on a distancing from the sacred.

3. The prestige of hunting as an activity is derived not from the fact that it is carried out by males but from its role as the context of a hunter-gatherer society's habitus—in other words, from the ensemble of relationships and social constructs enacted and reproduced through it (Zent 2006).

4. We witnessed three such marriages: the first was arranged between a girl (Mĩimĩnĩ'ĩwá) who was then barely 3 years old and a man of about 55 (Kamará Xa'a). In the second case, a girl (Pãnã Pĩnũhũ) who was about 12 when we met her had been married for some time prior to that to a man (Pira Ma'a) who was also in his fifties if not older; in the third case, Panãnĩ'ĩ, around 6 years of age, had been married for some time to Pinawa, then in his late thirties. Unfortunately she drowned in the river in 2008.

5. Such is the case of Parachĩ, married to Kamará and Chipa Ramãj Xa'a, and Amapirawi, married to Takïa and Muturuhũ, both at Jurití.

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