



## Marital exchange and cannibalism

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### Abstract

Sexuality and alimentation are related in many ways. In this paper only one of the social aspects of these relations is presented. Cannibal wars and human sacrifice are structurally bound to the rules of marriage in various societies. The comparative study presented is limited to only two very different primitive societies living in completely different ecosystems, showing the various ways in which they articulate their respective solutions to these basic human needs.

**Keywords:** Cannibalism, marital exchange, Tupi Guarani, Tunguz, Amazonia, Siberia, war, general anthropology, sociology, religion

**Słowa kluczowe:** kanibalizm, wymiana małżeńska, Tupi Guarani, Tunguzi, Amazonia, Syberia, wojna, antropologia, socjologia, religia

*Incest is nice as long as it stays in the family.*  
(English saying)

I would like to present some remarks concerning a persistent relation between two sets of behaviours that certainly count among the most fundamental in human cultures: marriage rules and cannibalism. As an illustration of these relations, I have selected two culturally separated and isolated groups occupying very different ecosystems. The first one, a group of Amazonian Indians, warlike hunter-gatherers and primitive agriculturists, the Tupi-Guarani. The other, a Siberian group of hunter-gatherers and herders of reindeer, the Tunguz. So that we are dealing here with two very different societies<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was inspired by Isabel Combès's book: *La tragédie cannibale chez les Tupi Guarani* (Paris 1992), and Kwon Heonik's paper: *Play the bear* ("History of Religions", 1999, vol. 38, no. 4, p. 373–383), which I found interesting to set in parallel, and to which I refer in general.

We will try to see how these two very different cultures manage two sets of apparently very distinct cultural practices as well. On the one hand the rules of kinship and alliance, and on the other, the religious practice of sacrifice in its most perfect form, the human sacrifice for the banquet of communion, a cannibal feast.

It is not really fashionable to compare such distant cultures, but I believe this approach is justified when we try to understand better such universal practices as those taken into consideration here. After all, the aim of anthropology is to look for universals in human behaviours illustrated by the relations between specific examples. Without supposing the universality of man, a general anthropology would lose all justifications. And the best way to establish the fundamental aspects of culture is to cast light on identical or parallel practices among very different ethnic groups.

I am not convinced that the comparison between rites of marriage and the cannibal banquet is very new; I even know that the relations between these two fields of cultural and ritual behaviours have already been noticed and commented on, but this was mainly in an ethnographic or sociological perspective limited to one group. It is therefore possible that a new approach to the problem treated comparatively and structurally will not be completely without interest.

Neither are the arguments used to construct a model here new; they are largely known in ethnology, anthropology, philosophy, the history of religions, and psychology. And this is welcome; at least we are moving in a secure field.

- 1) The symbolic equivalence between alimentary and sexual consumptions is well established, and there is no use in looking for sophisticated psychological theories, as a simple collection of the expressions used in gastronomic and erotic vocabularies show that collusion perfectly. And this is true in most languages of the world.
- 2) The vocabulary of hunting is also very often used as a symbolic parallel of sexual approach<sup>2</sup>. In active and aggressive hunts with spears, arrows, knocking or piercing, the game or prey is feminine. In passive hunts with hooks, nets, traps, the game is a male who enters by his own will and is taken, captured.
- 3) As the boundary between hunting and war is often unclear, we see that war itself is often an enterprise of general conquest, a fight for domination, the conquest of the land and its women, of one and the other, of both, a violation, trespassing borders and limits, entering the vital sphere of the other, a rape. But here again the conquest is often an illusion when the winner is assimilated physically and culturally by the local population, literally eaten and digested. This is a process in which women play a prominent role.

These well-known and often-described reasons clearly show that the relations between kinship, marital exchange and cannibalism are natural and come under common sense.

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<sup>2</sup> The most familiar image of it for the Europeans is that of Eros the archer. In America, the deer hunt frequently means an erotic chase. See André Leroi-Gourhan (*Les Religions de la Préhistoire* Paris 1964) and Annette Leming-Emperaire (*La Signification de l'art rupestre paléolithique*, Paris 1962) for the sexual interpretation of prehistoric iconography in terms of sexual dichotomy. This parallel is found in a large collection of myth, tales and the medieval literature.

Wars rarely take place between groups that are very different culturally and linguistically. On the contrary, the anthropologist Lawrence H. Keeley observes that ethnographers often met tribes who were looking for partners in marriage and commercial exchanges among groups with which they were periodically in a state of war<sup>3</sup>.

As far as sacrifice is concerned, it will be no exaggeration to state that all forms of sacrifices are minor and attenuated forms of the sacrifice par excellence, the human sacrifice, or even better its supreme form, self-sacrifice. But because candidates for self-sacrifice are not numerous, it is common to look for another victim, a substitute. The nearest and dearest substitute is the son. But the son is also too dear, so that a prisoner or a slave will often represent him. This is the reason why the victim is often called “my son”<sup>4</sup> by his captor. Further comes the sacrifice of an animal previously domesticated and treated as a member of the family.

In all cases, in the ideal scenario the victim would demonstrate a total lack of good manners if he was not consenting and willing to die for the welfare of the community. For the sacrifice to be successful and efficient, the victim must be voluntary and daring, show courage, and offer his life for the benefit of the community, its happiness, health and fecundity. By this offering of himself he proves to be divine, and thus, he is often declared a god, and painted and dressed as such. The victim must be consenting, otherwise it would be a crime.

We can also argue that the sacrifice always represents an attempt to solve vital problems by substitution in order to canalise and neutralise some dangers or fears. It always represents the theatrical solution of a problem without a solution, of a dangerous and unacceptable situation. We can easily understand ritual murder as a release of the aggressive tensions in the group, but how can we explain the cannibal feast?

We must absolutely reject all alimentary theories; the alimentary consumption of human flesh is extremely rare and limited to survival in situations of extreme famines. We will examine here exclusively ceremonial and religious cannibalism. This sort of cannibalism is first of all an extraordinary theatrical representation, “Such a strange tragedy”, as Jean de Léry expressed it so marvellously<sup>5</sup>.

Among the Tupi Guarani, the cannibal war was a general institution. The war was organised exclusively in order to take prisoners to be adopted, taken care of, and integrated in the group, with the only final aim of sacrificing and eating them in a banquet of communion for the whole village. The participation in the banquet is so general that when the prisoner is taken in the early morning of the day of his sacrifice, he is kindly “invited for supper”. The prisoner very rarely tries to escape: it would be a shame for all: for himself, his owner, as a sort of “alter ego”, and above all for all his clan, his tribe. Should he return to his village, his companions would kill him or

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<sup>3</sup> B. Ehrenreich, *Rytualy krwi*, Warszawa 1997, p. 137, citing L.H. Keeley, *War before Civilisation: the Myth of the Peaceful Savage*, Oxford 1996, p. 122.

<sup>4</sup> Especially in the Mexican “Flower war”.

<sup>5</sup> J. de Léry, *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Bresil, autrement dite Amerique (1580)*, Genève 1975, p. 223.

send him back, offended, with these words: “How? Don’t you believe we will be able to avenge your death?”<sup>6</sup>.

And here is the great word of cannibal wars. All explain it by vengeance, the vengeance for the death of a kin. Cannibal wars are built on the model of the vendetta. But in this term of vengeance, we can read another meaning: vengeance is revenge, paying a debt, offering a present or help for something previously received, paying back, in good or bad. It means a deal, an exchange of good manners between allies and neighbours (in Polish *rewanżować się*). The cannibal war takes place only between equals, inside the family, between respectable people. Some of the Tupi Guarani absolutely refused to eat Christian flesh, and when, during the first phase of evangelisation, the missionary wanted at least to baptise the prisoner before death, they opposed decidedly, saying that baptism spoiled the taste<sup>7</sup>. The cannibal war is as well ordered as any good English sport; it follows its rules of good manners carefully.

In the eyes of the Tupi Guarani themselves, to die at war, or even better be sacrificed in the most honourable place, in the middle of the village yard, presents many advantages. The *boucan*, that is the grill or barbecue, is called the bed of honour.

- 1) To die at war offers the privilege of dying young and in good health, and thus escape the miseries of old age and its decrepitude.
- 2) What the Indians fear most is to be buried in dark, cold and wet earth where the body decays for a long time. For them, as long as the bones are not completely white and clean, the soul of the dead wanders about the grave, suffering. By scraping the bones completely, the Indians offer a very precious funerary service. To be sacrificed and eaten liberates the soul of the dead so that it can fly directly towards a sort of paradise, a territory situated far in the west, beyond the Andes, where the migrating birds also disappear and which they call the Earth Without Evil<sup>8</sup>.
- 3) This comparison with migrating birds constitutes a promise of return in the next season, immortality, rebirth, resurrection.
- 4) If the eating of the flesh frees the soul and insures immortality, it also offers immortality to the body, and in the most pragmatic way. The body is directly reintegrated in the living organisms of the guests, and thus the vital parts, the flesh, organs and bowels also become immortal. The service is of reciprocity as it is based on perpetual vengeance. When the prisoner arrives in the village he first salutes women, calling to them: “Here is your food walking in”<sup>9</sup>. And adds daringly: “You fools, don’t you know that it is your own flesh you are going to eat, because we have eaten so many of yours?”<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> I. Combès, *La tragédie cannibale...*, p. 58; C. d’Abbeville, *Histoire de la mission des pères capucins en l’isle de Maragnan et terres circonvoisines* (1614), Graz 1964, p. 90.

<sup>7</sup> P. de Laval, *Voyage contenant sa navigation aux Indes Orientales, Maldives, Moluques et au Brésil*, 1679, III, p. 132.

<sup>8</sup> I. Combès, *La tragédie cannibale...*, p. 159–161.

<sup>9</sup> H. van Staden, *Nus, ferores et anthropophages (1557)*, Paris 1979, p. 73.

<sup>10</sup> I. Combès, *La tragédie cannibale...*, p. 61, 66; H. von. Staden, *Nus féroces et anthropophages (1557)*, Paris 1p. 193; A. Thevet, *La cosmographie universelle*, Paris 1575, p. 945; M. Montaigne, *Les Essais*, Paris 1962, p. 211.

The cannibal war is, then, first of all a family business, between folks of good company, agreeing perfectly on the rules of the game, speaking the same language and understand each other well.

By this point, though, my kind readers might wonder what all this has to do with the rules of marital exchange.

Well, aren't wars in general waged to gain women? In rape and abuse during hostilities, as regular wives after victory? The Sabines helped their rapists to fight against their own brothers and fathers in order to negate the offence and return to a peaceful life as soon as possible.

For the Tupi Guarani, we shall note first of all that war eliminates a great number of young men. In normal conditions of primitive war with limited technical means, it is evident that statistically the survivors will be the slickest, the quickest, the strongest and the most aggressive, in a word the fittest for life, the best. We have here to deal with a highly ritualised and institutionalised system of natural selection. A well-ordered selection primarily concerns males, and the immediate corollary of that genetic selection is the very honourable practice of polygamy. Since constantly, generation after generation, the weakest among the strongest are eliminated, and the vital forces of the most valiant enemies are reintegrated, the cannibal war in some way constitutes a process of repeated distillations, of genetic rectifications. This integration of the qualities of the prisoner certainly explains why the winners always praise his strength and courage. When, rarely, a prisoner escapes and is recaptured, he no longer belongs to his captor and the group of warriors because his fear degrades him, a food of lower quality, and is left to women who greatly rejoice, especially the old ones<sup>11</sup>.

In order to be fit for being eaten, the prisoner must be a stranger and familiar at once. So one of the first things he receives after being brought to the village is a wife. It is in this way that he is integrated, domesticated. By his marriage, the stranger becomes a man. And significantly, in the Tupi language the same word, "Tova", means both an enemy and a brother-in-law<sup>12</sup>. This word means the adversary, the other party. By this marriage, the Tova enemy coming from another province becomes a Tova brother-in-law of the same province, and so an ally, at least for some time. In all cases the proper distance must be respected.

The integration of the enemy is procured by his marriage.

We must underline here that among the Tupi Guarani, the preferred model of marital exchange is of a girl with her maternal uncle, the brother of her mother. And thus, for a man, the best possible wife is the daughter of his sister, a uterine niece.

The maternal uncle, as with all the male blood relatives of the mother, is necessarily a stranger because of the patrilocal rule of residence.

Which, then, are the preferred marital alliances for the prisoner?

- 1) First of all, the widow of a warrior who died in war or was sacrificed by the enemies. In this polygenic society which also practises levirate, in order to take a widow for a wife, she first has to be married temporarily to a war pris-

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<sup>11</sup> Y. d'Évreux, *Voyage au nord du Brésil fait en 1613 et 1614*, Paris 1985, p. 70-71.

<sup>12</sup> I. Combès, *La tragédie cannibal...*, p. 72.

oner designated to be sacrificed. The sacrifice of the prisoner avenges the death of her spouse and makes possible the remarriage of the widow, but by marrying the widow, the prisoner also for a time replaces the dead husband, and so takes the place and role of the dead one, designated to the same fate.

2) Second, the prisoner may also marry the sister of his captor, his owner, his master.

3) He can also marry the daughter of his owner.

When he marries a widow, the prisoner plays the role of the brother of the dead warrior (the legitimate levirate); as such, he also becomes the uncle of the woman because of the prevailing model of alliance, and necessarily as well the hated uncle of his captor.

When he marries the sister of his master, the prisoner plays not only the uncle of the woman, but again also as well the uncle of his captor and his brother-in-law.

When he marries the daughter of his master, the prisoner is the brother-in-law (brother of the wife of his master); he is also the son-in-law of his master (husband of the master's daughter), but again, his nephew (son of his captor's sister).

In all cases, the relationship of enmity between nephew and maternal uncle is present.

It is evident that all is played in the fields of forbidden and obligatory alliances. The enmity which we observe in this society is rooted to the very deep and strong sentiments between brothers and sisters. As in classical tragedy and in real life, the tragedy takes place inside the closest family bounds.

We clearly observe here a series of variations of the Oedipus situation.

– The desire for the mother is forbidden by the presence of the father.

– The substitution of this desire is reported on the nearest female, the sister, again forbidden by the social rule.

– The desire is then directed to the next nearest female in the social network, passing along the female line, that is the daughter of the sister.

In these societies, the brother-in-law is at the same time the maternal uncle. And because of the patrilocal rule of residence, the uncle is necessarily a stranger, a foreigner; territorially speaking, he belongs to the external world, the savage world, an enemy. We understand well that in such conditions, this stranger who has taken away a beloved sister is hated and treated as an enemy. But on the other hand, the rule of marriage between a girl and her maternal uncle creates a real system of reciprocity which only jumps by one generation. It is this time of waiting to compensate the loss, to establish reciprocity, which creates animosity and the time of war. The couple of the maternal uncle and the sister of "Ego" is obliged to offer him their daughter. This is the reason why Ego, the warrior, reserves for himself the daughter of his sister as soon as she is born; when she is still a baby, he takes her in his hands, up to the sky, and declares: "This is my wife". Being constrained to let a sister go away with the enemy, in the next generation, Ego takes back her daughter. The loss of a sister is compensated by the return of her daughter in the mother's paternal clan, and it is only at this moment that the enmity between the brothers-in-law is solved. But the problem is then only reported a generation further because the future wife also has broth-

ers, and Ego immediately finds himself in the role of the hated uncle. This alternation of roles in each successive generation creates ritual time. The cannibal rituals serve to solve these family tragedies and the social tensions created by the rule of necessary marital exchanges hurting natural sentiments. Because it is forbidden to really kill the hated uncle/brother-in-law (Tova antagonist), who belongs to the same province and is somehow and anyway an ally, they will kill the hereditary enemy, the Tova enemy from another province, who will play the role of the uncle brother-in-law. It is only at the cost of murdering this substitute of the brother-in-law that a man can marry a widow, as if the ritual of cannibal wars symbolically allowed recuperation of the sister, the incestuous object of desire.

Let us see now how things go among the Tunguz of Oriental Siberia. There, we do not find any cannibal wars, but hunting the bear and its feast, a ceremony of killing the bear and eating its flesh, which presents many parallels to the cannibal tragedy in Amazonia. It is not difficult to understand that the bear really represents the nearest substitute to a human victim.

In old-time genealogies, many families in Europe declare having taken their origin from bear ancestors. The tale of John the Bear and the medieval stories of Valentine and Orson are known in many variations all over the world. The oldest written mention of this story is found in Olaus Magnus, "De gentibus septentrionalibus", which reports how a young lady was taken away by a bear to his cavern in the forest and later returned with a son, the strongest and most clever of all men. Such beliefs continued until our times, and Petiri Prebonde in the Basque land was still telling in 1983 that the Basques always believed they were descended from bears<sup>13</sup>.

We find indeed many similarities between man and bear.

- 1) Both are born premature and need extreme care from their mothers.
- 2) Both are catholic in their alimentation, they eat everything, and are rivals for collecting, hunting and fishing.
- 3) Both walk in a vertical position, and in the Pyrenees, the bear is sometimes called a barefoot vagabond because of the traces he leaves on the ground, looking like those of naked human feet.

In Siberia, it is said that under his fur the bear looks exactly like a woman. Feet, hands, legs and arms, his breasts and sex. So the bear is an alter ego of man, his wild version, perfectly illustrated by the tale of Valentine and Orson. The bear is a wild man, simply a little more hairy. The son of our Basque informant who declared that his people were descended from bears added that although he was a great and famous bear hunter, he could never eat its flesh because he felt like vomiting at the very smell of it: it looks too much like human flesh, he said. Such declarations are also known from North American Indians<sup>14</sup>.

But we also find numerous nations in which the flesh of the bear is highly valued. In Poland and Lithuania up to the 17th century, the paws of bears were a princely dish

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<sup>13</sup> C. Dendaletch, *Les Pyrénées – La vie sauvage en montagne et celle des hommes*, Neuchât, 1997, p. 173.

<sup>14</sup> R. Frank, *Hunting the European Sky Bear: when bears ruled the Earth and guarded the Gate of Heaven* [in:] *Astronomical Traditions in Past Cultures*, V. Koleva, D. Kolev (eds.), Sofia 1996, p. 127.

reserved for hosts of high rank. The Siberian and North American bear feasts are famous. The bear hunt is the prelude to great banquets gathering kin and allies, and the beast's flesh is considered the most sublime of all sorts of food, just as human flesh is among the Tupi Guarani. If in primitive societies the consumption of meat is always common and ritualised, in the bear ceremony of Siberian and North American societies this ritual is exemplary.

So the bear is really the alter ego of a human being and the consumption of its flesh solemn and sacred. Does this mean that the banquet of a bear is a cannibal one, or its most immediate substitute? The answer can only be affirmative. The bear is declared a wild man or grandfather, and when the hunters have killed him, they beg him for pardon. The bears are usually born two by two, and in Siberia, when a woman gives birth to twins, they believe she will become wild, return to the forest and become a bear.

Let us now revise a few parallels between these two rituals:

- 1) In the same way as the prisoner in Amazonia, the bear in Siberia is captured to be kept and fed in the village. The bear cubs are milked by women like children, and all the community feeds the bear with their best possible food, just as is the case in Amazonia for the war prisoner. In the end, in both groups all members will have to strike the victim.
- 2) The banquet is a banquet of communion which unites all members of the group, kin and collaterals.
- 3) The banquet precedes the establishment of new matrimonial alliances.

We could add many other common traits, but let us see rather the relations existing between the bear hunt and the rules of marriage among the Tunguz.

Among the Tunguz, the preferred model of alliance is between matrilateral crossed cousins, that is to say the marriage of a man with the daughter of his maternal uncle. Contrarily to what we observe among the Tupi Guarani, where the maternal uncle robs the sister of his nephew, here, the maternal uncle offers his daughter for marriage and appears as a benefactor and the best possible ally. This is the opposite situation to the Tupi Guarani, where the maternal uncle is a captor of women and an enemy.

Here too the social structure is reflected in the rites of hunting. When an older man finds a hibernating bear, he does not try to kill it alone or with the help of his kin; instead he carefully notes the place of the hibernating bear in the forest and goes to find his nephew, the son of his sister, to ask him to come and hunt the bear together. The older man will pick the bear in its den from behind, so the bear comes out where the nephew is posted, waiting to kill it. The nephew, son of the sister, necessarily belongs to a rival clan because of the patrilocal rule of residence. When a man who has a daughter to marry goes to invite his nephew to strike the bear he chases out of his lair, it means he is throwing his daughter out of home to offer her in marriage to his nephew, he is giving her away – and it is in this way that he invites his nephew to marry his daughter.

Conversely, when a young man, still a bachelor, finds the bear in its den, he goes and call for his uncle to come and help with waking the bear and forcing it out. It is



only then that the young man can kill the bear with spear or arrows thrown in the heart. This also means the nephew is asking for the daughter of his uncle in marriage. In both cases the roles are perfectly established: the uncle is a generous and consenting wife-giver and the nephew a thankful and respectful wife-taker.

The person chosen to throw his arrow in the heart of the bear is either the nephew of an uncle with a daughter to marry, his future son-in-law, or already his son-in-law, because the son-in-law is the son of his sister in the reference model.

In this symbolical set, we can say that the bear is always a female, a she-bear, and indeed, in some tribes, when the bear has been killed and is lying on the ground, the older hunters encourage the younger ones to lay down over the body of the bear and simulate coitus. In reality, the hunted bear is almost always a female, moreover a female with young cubs, because males and lonely females usually escape the presence of men and do not fight back. Only a mother bear will stay on the spot and attack, to defend her premature cubs. Once the mother is killed, the cubs are taken alive to the village and are taken care of and fed until they are big enough to play the victim in a theatre representation on the village place of a real hunt. This again is similar to the situation in Amazonia, where the children of the prisoner are also designated for ritual death.

We see well that in both cases, in Amazonia or Siberia, the hunt or war and the banquet are a prelude and condition to new matrimonial alliances.

In Siberia, the bear feast finishes with a general abuse of food, alcoholic drinks and erotic games for all the present youth belonging to different clans invited to this occasion. In Amazonia the cannibal feast is followed by the remarriage of the widow with the winner, the captor of the prisoner who had for a time been the husband of the widow. At the same occasion he can also take as wives one or more female prisoners captured during the expedition, that is to say he takes as wives all the widows of his victim or victims. But because the enemy is a Tova, a brother-in-law uncle, this in fact means that he is regaining the loss of all his sisters after they were made distant enough by their marriage with a stranger.

The bear hunt is a ritualised marriage, a fecundation; in Amazonia the cannibal banquet is supposed to make women fecund, including the old ones.

The strong relations between cannibalism and marital exchange are thus strongly documented in general, but we observe meaningful structural differences between the practices of these two ethnic groups.

Here and there we have to deal with a system of exchange, of commerce, but in Amazonia the re-establishment of balance in reciprocity jumps by one generation, which means a man has to wait for a long time before he can receive a wife for his lost sister, when she will have borne a daughter and after this daughter is grown enough. This lasting frustration necessarily produces an aggressiveness which is canalised in war against the Tova's enemies representing the hated Tova uncle brother-in-law. When the compensation comes at last, it is at the price of a renewed hostility because the nephew finds himself in the position of the hated uncle of the young brother of his wife, and becomes the potential victim of cannibal vengeance. The same structure reproduces itself eternally, and this is the reason why these vendettas

are endless and find their roots in the mythical tales of origin. In Amazonia we observe societies in constant disequilibrium, looking for balance and stability by increasing the movement of a permanent state of war, running ahead, very aggressively. Those societies burn energy and keep going only by a constant sacrifice of human lives. We can also notice that the model victim is a man, a warrior; but if all men and women consume him, they do it for different reasons and with different aims. The warriors eat him with anger, to avenge the death of their lost companions and also to assimilate more energy, the vital powers of the victim. Women also eat the flesh of the victim to assimilate his vital strength, but certainly in a less aggressive way. The consumption of the war prisoner is considered as fecundating, and the Tupi Guarani believe that the cannibal banquet will return even old women to fecundity. If we accept the identity of the unique term “Tova” for enemy and brother-in-law, during the cannibal feast, it is symbolically always kin, brother, father, uncle, nephew that women are eating. Etiological myths of cannibalism often present incest between brother and sister as the primary cause of cannibalism.

This consumption really bears a religious aspect, as it symbolically permits accomplishment of desires generally forbidden to human beings and reserved for the gods, and only members of the clan participate in the feast. The cannibal banquet makes humans lighter, carrying them into heaven.

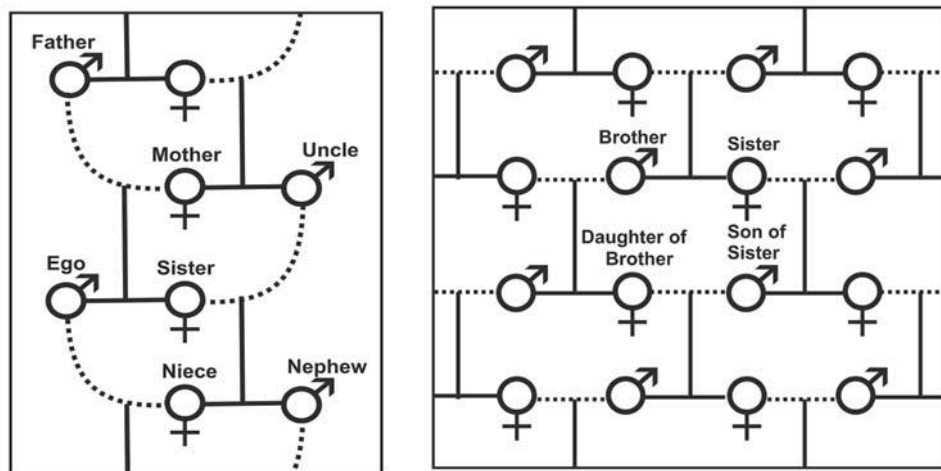
Among the Tunguz, the bear is a substitute for the human victim, and it is always a female, or anyway considered as such, playing the role of a female. There, the matrimonial rule is between crossed cousins of the same generation, son of sister with daughter of brother. The fact that the exchange is simultaneous eliminates frustration and aggression.

Another factor of reduction of the aggression is that instead of taking a real and dangerous enemy captured at war, here we find a consenting victim offered by her father. When the young man lies on the body of the dead bear, he tells her: “be kind and sweet like a woman”.

After the cooking of the flesh of the bear, the body of the animal again becomes the object of alimentary consumption for all present guests united, kin and collaterals share the flesh as a prelude to real marriages between members of different clans. They share in food what separates them for sex.

Here too, we observe a whole set of symbolical equivalences and chain substitutions, but the balance is re-established as soon as possible and without violence between men. We face a very stable system, an economical one, the evacuation of tensions between men in a peaceful way is obtained at the cost of an animal substitute.

The marital exchange of the Tupi Guarani is running ahead, based on wars and vengeance. It keeps balance in the alternative and symmetrical movements, as in walking or running, some sort of dynamic symmetrical limping. The position of the uncle is also the position of the enemy “Tova”. The uncle is at the same time the brother-in-law (husband of sister) of Ego. In the next generation the uncle becomes the father-in-law (father of wife) of Ego. The father of Ego is the husband of the maternal grand-mother of Ego. This jump of one generation creates the movement of



Tupi Guarani

Tunguz

wars and vengeance. This extremely tight network of social relations creates the permanent tragedy.

In the case of the Siberian marital exchange, the cousins of the same generation, the son of a woman marries the daughter of her brother; the exchange is simultaneous and convivial, and does not generate animosity.

The graphs of these two systems show why the Amazonian model is so energetic and aggressive and the Siberian one so stable and peaceful. But in both cases, those hunts or wars are fundamentally bound to the vital problems of the group, to the crucial problem of matrimonial exchange.

Both try to solve an impossibility, a radical contradiction: on the one hand how to keep and stay inside the family, between people of good company, without having to mix with despised or hated strangers, and on the other, the necessity to exchange and communicate. The solution of both societies is to take a wife as near as possible inside the blood, just at the limit of the forbidden closest relatives, just at the limit of the prohibition of incest. In Amazonia the nephew (third degree of consanguinity), in Siberia the cousin (fourth degree of consanguinity). Both of them practise extremely severe systems of genetic selection, constant purification of the blood, repeated distillation.

Could we extend these remarks to other societies? Certainly so. Let us just remember that among the Ossets, when a young man comes to ask for the hand of a girl, her mother asks him invariably and ritually: "Who are you to be so presumptuous? Tell me whom did you kill to ask for the hand of my daughter?"<sup>15</sup>, and maybe even more clearly, the Mae Enga of New Guinea declare simply: "We only marry with women coming from peoples with whom we make war"<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> A. Iteanu, *Qui as-tu tué pour demander la main de ma fille? Violence et mariage chez les Ossètes* [in:] *La Vengeance*, R. Verdier (ed.), vol. 2, Paris 1986, p. 61–82.

<sup>16</sup> B. Ehrenreich, *Rytualy krwi*, Warszawa 1997, p. 137.