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Sharing, Sociality, and Stratification

Exchange and Godparentage in the Amazon

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Abstract. – Sharing is commonly associated with close and intimate groups characterised by symmetrical relations. In this essay, the generality of this assumption is challenged and it is argued that it is necessary to take into consideration the particular cultural and historical conditions of each case. Departing from the subordinate position, many Amazonian peoples experience in relation to White people I explore how the institution of godparentage is employed by Matsigenka people of southeastern Peru to emulate a sharing context in order to overcome the inequality of the relationship and thus allowing access to assumedly superior White people things. *[Peru, Amazonas, Matsigenka, sharing, social asymmetry, compadrazgo]*

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The modality of exchange transactions in which people engage are commonly seen as manifestations of the involved parties' mutual social positions. In accordance, sharing, that is, the moral obligation to allow certain others a right to (part of) one's belongings without calculated expectations of material recompense, is a phenomenon that generally is associated with egalitarian peoples and/or socially intimate groups and the practice is, as a rule, assumed to express symmetry, belonging, and unity. In contrast, gift-giving and reciprocity are described as phenomena that link separate parties into asymmetric dyads and, in the process, producing and reproducing relations of alterity and inequality. Undoubtedly, this simple dichotomy is compelling in its obvious and straightforward social logic. However, in spite of the apparent inevitability of these assumptions I here challenge the unquestioning and mechanical manner in which they often are applied and, more particularly, I argue that under specific cultural and historic conditions sharing may be part of asymmetric social relations.

While the ethnographic literature abounds with studies of reciprocity in its various forms, comparatively little attention has been paid to forms of sharing and its significance. An important qualification, however, was made by Nicolas Peterson (1993) who introduced a distinction between unsolicited giving and demand sharing. The former is realised on the initiative of the giver, while the latter takes place on the initiative of the receiver. Seemingly, unsolicited giving is the more altruistic of the two kinds of transactions. To the contrary, though, the ethnographic literature amply demonstrates that unsolicited giving forces the receiver into debt and subordination,[1] while demand sharing is based on the moral obligation of the giver to share resources with fellow group members.[2] Accordingly, shar-

1 Cf. Gregory (1982); Mauss (1974); Sahlins (1972).
2 Cf. Ingold (1986); Price (1975); Woodburn (1998).

ing as a social phenomenon is not primarily about giving, receiving, and reciprocating since it is part of a social context within which property rights are subordinated to moral values of intimacy and conviviality. The flow of objects between people joined by expectations of sharing is thus not an exchange, not even a deferred exchange, in the sense of, for instance, Mauss (1974), Lévi-Strauss (1987), and Sahlins (1972).[3] Neither should sharing be confused with free gifts (cf. Malinowski 1961). Even though gift-giving and sharing seem to have certain characteristics in common, this is largely superficial in that gift-giving consists of single transfers that may or may not be reciprocated, while sharing is a social system within which people can make demands on the property of others since they belong to the same social setting.

In contrast to the otherwise predominant focus on foraging societies, most studies of sharing among Amazonian peoples have departed from more or less sedentary horticulturalists. Arguably, the most influential contributions have been presented by Joanna Overing (1992) and Laura Rival (2002). Overing emphasises the distinction between production and exchange. Production concerns the procurement or transformation of resources through one's own or close relatives' labour while exchange refers to the acquisition of objects produced by people who are foreign to such intimate social spheres. In this context, production includes the sharing of resources within the group of close relatives and, it is argued, together these practices function as structuring principles for the maintenance of tranquillity and security within the local community. In contrast, exchange signifies contact with foreigners, which means that there is an element of competition and, thus, danger is potentially involved. In a similar fashion, Rival underscores the principally social significance of sharing which she associates with an abundance of food. A wealth of foodstuff means the absence of competition and social intimacy is, therefore, expressed in acts of giving where, Rival (2002: 104) underscores, "givers never become creditors, nor receivers debtors." In accordance, both Overing and Rival underline the symmetric "within" character of sharing that obliterates or disregards social differences while the unification of those partaking in such transactions is promoted in contrast to the asymmetric "between" character of reciprocal exchange.

The analyses of Overing and Rival contribute importantly to the understanding of the social significance of sharing. However, I wish presently to inquire further into the degree to which the assumed character of Selves and Others linked to different forms of transactions can be generalised. Accordingly, I argue that the form that sharing practices take must be understood in its particular context. During certain conditions sharing may, thus, form part of relations that are markedly unequal. In contrast to both Overing and Rival, who see sharing as an expression of sameness, Bathurst (2009) argues that among Tacana people of Bolivia sharing serves to distribute more evenly any surplus and, thus, sharing in this case contributes to balance relations and create equality. Here I will examine another possibility: when difference and asymmetry is the rationale for the practice, and its maintenance is therefore crucial. As an illustration I examine modes of sharing among Matsigenka people of the southeastern Peruvian montaña amongst whom sharing relations at times are established with the intention to capitalise precisely on social differences. Sameness is, in consequence, no requirement for sharing and significant differences do accordingly not necessarily keep people apart for fear of predation as they at times can function as a force of attraction.

In Amerindian accounts of White people these are frequently portrayed as superior much because of their advanced technology and material culture which Amerindians often find attractive although not always readily accessible. The social intersection between native and White people may, however, serves as a resource that allows for the creative articulation of the social dynamics between persons belonging to the two groups. The asymmetry between Amerindian and White people does, accordingly, not automatically imply subordination since means can be found to take advantage of White people's superiority, for instance, by making them part of the indigenous moral community. Thus, White people's supremacy can be exploited which arguably accords with the antipathy to hierarchical structures common among Amazonian peoples (Overing and Passes (2000: 2). This possibility does remain, however, only as long as White people are distinct and superior in relation to native people. By exploring Amazonian conceptions and practices of godparentage, I examine notions among Matsigenka people among whom such relations are deployed to produce a rapprochement of identity that still maintains the crucial alterity and asymmetry which make the relation productive and whereby access to White people things is made possible.

3 Mauss, Lévi-Strauss, and Sahlins, important as they may be for the anthropological understanding of exchange and gift-giving, constitute only the top of a huge iceberg. For a review of the development of anthropological thinking with regard to these phenomena see, e.g., Sykes (2005).

White People and Their Things in Matsigenka People's Lifeworlds

White people often appear in Amazon peoples' myths and historical narratives and, at times, they play a part in cosmological understandings as a force of alterity. In spite of the significance given to them, White people are frequently represented in a fairly one-dimensional and stereotypical manner which, most likely, emerges from actual experiences acquired during the history of encounters. Such images of White people in narratives suggest that these meetings have more often than not been frightening and the figures recurrently presented in the accounts are, accordingly, male monsters with great powers which they use to harass and dominate indigenous people. Since the monstrous nature and the powers usually are considered to be associated, White people are often conceptualised ambivalently. At the same time as the monster is detestable as a person, his powers are attractive and alluring. This ambiguity raises a moral problem since obviously the powers involved may be harmful to the possessor if he or she is not cautious and vigilant. In White people's principal cosmogonic myth their ancestors clearly lacked this moral insight: Adam and Eve indulged in the sweetness of the apple of knowledge and thus they exposed themselves to the power's influence with obvious effects upon their descendants' disposition towards the surrounding world. In contrast, Amazon people are conscious of the necessity to control and carefully handle this kind of knowledge.[4]

According to Matsigenka people's cosmogony,[5] in the beginning of time there lived two gods whom we know as Tasorintsi and Kentibákori. Tasorintsi created everything that is good, while Kentibákori created everything that is bad or, at best, useless.[6] Among the creations of Tasorintsi we find the *matsigenka*, a category of beings that includes all Amazon peoples, *saangarite* spirits, some animals, and a few plants. Among the beings created by Kentibákori we find, for instance, White people. Thus, even though the two classes of beings look similar the likeness is only superficial since *matsigenka*, or human people, have a different origin from that of White people.

During the first time after the creation, life for human people was truly perfect. With the powers and skills they were given by Tasorintsi they could make sure that they had everything they needed and could wish for. These capacities are lost today and humans have to accept their shortcomings as well as the hard life they now are bound to live. The irony of this predicament is that the present condition was brought on at the initiative of humans themselves. A man who was bored by the perfect life that he was leading one day approached Tasorintsi and requested to become mortal and to become susceptible to disease and hunger. Tasorintsi tried to make the man see what a good life he was living, but the man would not listen and he continued to insist upon the fulfilment of his demands. Disappointed by the man's demonstration of ingratitude, Tasorintsi eventually complied with his wishes and, indignant, he departed to the world from whence he came, never to take any further interest in the destiny of humans. As he took his leave, Tasorintsi brought along all the good stuff that he had created and on this Earth remained only second-rate copies of his original creations.

Even though both Tasorintsi and Kentibákori now have deserted Earth, there are still gods who live here. The interest that these gods take in humans and their affairs today is minimal at best though indirectly some of them still continue to influence the lives of human people. One of these gods is Yavíreri[7] who is renowned for his creativity since he is the inventor of many fabulous things which today principally are associated with manufactured goods: to exemplify people commonly mention things like shotguns, airplanes, cars, TVs, mobile telephones, and wristwatches. Formerly Yavíreri maintained close relations with the humans whom he allowed to use the fantastic gadgets that he created, but which he at the moment exclusively gives to White people.[8] This change of his attention was caused by a

4 Cf. Overing (1985); Roe (1988); Londoño Sulkin (2005).

5 The analysis of cosmogony and myth provides a convenient avenue to peoples' intersubjective apprehension of the world as these narratives emerge in dialogues between narrators and their conventional audiences. The local intelligibility of the stories requires moreover that there exists an acceptable relation between experience and understanding and, thus, concepts and perspectives that the conventional audience take for granted may be elicited. Though, as Vilaça (2010: 7) observes, the relation between myth and accounts of historical events should be seen as logical rather than historical.

6 Kentibákori is, accordingly, not an inherently evil demiurge but a blunderer whose powers and skills do not measure up to those of Tasorintsi who similarly is not inherently benign.

7 This Yavíreri should not be confused with the major creator god who also is known as Yavíreri. My sources insist that the two Yavíreri are different characters and that the one referred to here is the son of a Matsigenka woman called Yakónera and the god Shígeri (hawk). According to alternative versions, the god in question was known as Chaingabane who is said to be a brother of Yavíreri (cf. Pereira 1944; Renard-Casevitz y Dollfus 1988).

8 Similar ideas are encountered throughout the Amazon. Thus, e.g., Waiwai people, living on the opposite side of this immense region, speculated for a while whether White people

series of events that are described in myth, a brief version of which follows below.

How Yavíreri Ended up among White People and How the Matsigenka Lost Their Source of Knowledge and Ingenuity[9]

Yavíreri used to live at Megantoni (the lower part of the long series of ferocious rapids that pass through the narrow canyon that on official maps is known as Pongo de Mainique). There Yavíreri gathered many people and there he kept large depots of the wonderful things that he invented.[10] One night Yavíreri dreamt that Kéatsi, an evil water demon, was in the neighbourhood and he understood the dream to be a premonition of Kéatsi's imminent appearance. Yavíreri told all those living with him about the dream and he admonished them not to go into the river until the danger had passed. One of his sons did not heed the warning and, consequently, the demon captured and devoured the boy. As soon as Yavíreri learned about the fate of his son, he set out in pursuit of Kéatsi. He travelled downriver trailing the monster until he eventually caught up with him. The demon's stomach was cut open and the little boy was rescued. On their way back home they stayed overnight on a beach where they heard the song of the cayenne cuckoo. Yavíreri understood this to be another ill-boding augury, this time warning the company from returning to Megantoni. The following morning Yavíreri turned around and the company steered downriver again. They kept on travelling until they eventually ended up among the White people with whom Yavíreri decided to remain. Instead of furnishing humans with his wonderful inventions it is accordingly White people who now have access to this source of advanced and superior technology. Hence, White people have at their disposal the capacities that they were given by Kentibákori at the time of creation, they have the help and the knowledge of the Christian God, Dioshi, whom they have brought to the montaña and, since his arrival to their land, also that of Yavíreri. Consequently, White people's knowledge is greater and their technology is superior to that of other humans, which allow White people to dominate and to avail themselves with force or cunning of land and resources at the expense of human people.

Since the time White people started to come to the montaña, they bring many of the wonderful things that they have acquired from Yavíreri. Following from the divine origin of White people things[11] and the notion that all things manufactured incorporate something of their producer,[12] these things acquire an added force of attraction to Matsigenka people that goes beyond their economic and practical values. In consequence, the early missionaries' use of gifts of White people things was a successful strategy in attracting potential converts to the missionary posts established at the outskirts of the area where Matsigenka people were living.[13]

In spite of the presence of White people in the region, the opportunities for Matsigenka people to acquire objects produced by White people have been limited until quite recently. In the region, trade with White people was formerly almost completely monopolised by, on the one hand, missionaries[14] and, on the other, Piro (Camino Diez Canzeco 1977; Gow 1991) and Conibo (DeBoer 1986) people. These three groups' interest in trading with Matsigenka people was limited since they apparently had little of interest to offer besides fellow Matsigenka who were captured and sold as slaves.

Until the latter half of the 19th century the area was only rarely visited by White people. With the booms of first sarsaparilla and then rubber the situ-

were descendants of the god Mawari who seems in some sense to parallel Yavíreri as an inventor god (Howard 2000: 43).

9 This account of the myth is based principally on the version told by Darío Mahuantiari in Koribeni, in August 1998.

10 It has been suggested that the idea of a powerful man with a large warehouse at this location is a reminiscence of an Inka trading post (cf. Álvarez 1980). To my knowledge there is, however, no further corroboration of the existence of such a trading post. Even though the ancestors of the present-day Matsigenka may have engaged in trade with the Inka, I would assume that Inka trading posts were situated much further upriver. Among the neighbouring Asháninka an inventor god, similar to Yavíreri, is known as "Ínka" (Weiss 1975: 267) or "Pachakamaite" (Benavides 1986; Varese 1973: 309). The obvious Andean provenance of these names has been taken as an indication of the Andean origin of this character. Weiss (1986), though, suggests that it is only the names that are of Andean origin and that they have been applied to a local tradition.

11 Even though White people things today often are produced in Asia, they are to Matsigenka people's associated with White people who seem to have such things in abundance.

12 Cf. McCallum (2001); Santos-Granero (2009); Walker (2012).

13 The earliest account describing this strategy in relation to Matsigenka people that I have come across is a letter from 1751 to the king of Spain in which Father Gil Muñoz (1906: 150f.) describes how the Jesuits at Hacienda Cocabambilla paid one axe from Biscay or two axes produced in Peru in exchange for Matsigenka boys and girls to convert.

14 The French explorer Paul Marcoy visited the Cocabambilla hacienda in 1846 and reports (1875/I: 376) that the missionaries tried to control the trade between the highlands and the lowlands (see also Brown and Fernández 1991; Gow 1991; Santos-Granero 1991).

ation changed and White people began to make their presence felt. After the crash of the Amazonian rubber economy in 1914, a number of non-Amazonians remained in the Upper Urubamba area. The poorer of these people were soon assimilated into the Matsigenka population, while those better-off tried to establish themselves as petty landlords or *patrónes*. Although these farmers were physically present, socially they remained outside of Matsigenka society. Owing to their relatively small numbers, they relied on indigenous labourers whom they tried to tie permanently to their farms.

As a consequence, not all that long ago should Matsigenka people get access to White people things it usually signified their subordination to White *hacendados* under what may seem to be conditions of slavery. Until the mid-1970s, adult men commonly received a shirt and a machete for a year's labour for the *patrónes* and things that he, or his household, received in addition to this "wage" added on to the debt that tied the family to the farmer. The local terms for this system of compensation are *habilitación*, "outfitting," or *enganche*, "hooking," i.e., deceiving, which reflect the various ways in which the relationship can be represented. To see the relationship as exploitative, however, is principally based on an understanding of exchange value as defined by the market according to which the payment received by Matsigenka people was outrageously unfair. However, as Hugh-Jones (1992) observes, Amazonian and White people may entertain different regimes of value in their respective appreciation of manufactured objects which, as in the present case, explains Amazonian peoples' acceptance of debt and the often hard labour conditions required to procure White people things (see also Walker 2012).

This dependence on White people to acquire White people things is now largely a thing of the past, as new opportunities for obtaining such goods present themselves with the increased integration into the market economy. Currently, quite a few young people in several of the Matsigenka communities of the region seem to find salaried employment with foreign agents. The money that these young people earn is spent principally on White people things such as TV sets, video players, motorcycles, and clothes rather than to sustain their families. While White people things always have been desirable, this apparent infatuation with them seems to be fairly new. Formerly, even though White people things were coveted, there were also parallel priorities that surpassed the interest in foreign goods. Thus, although Matsigenka people in the Upper Urubamba area have been cultivating coffee for commercial purposes for the last 40 to 50 years, many opted until recently to spend the dry season fishing, even though this period coincides with the peak of the coffee harvest.

Matsigenka Notions of Sharing and Exchange

Internally, within Matsigenka society, formalised barter is essentially nonexistent. The insignificance of internal trading is, arguably, associated with the negligible degree of specialisation beyond that which, according to Matsigenka gender ideology, is defined as sexually determined. As a rule, all the skills necessary for producing the material necessities of life exist within the Matsigenka residence group within which objects are either shared or can be easily borrowed. There is, accordingly, nothing comparable to the neighbouring Asháninka people's *ayompari* networks that link individuals in chains of deferred exchange through which goods may be moved over long distances.[15]

Matsigenka people usually put much value on generosity and if someone should ask for something, it would be awkward to deny handing over the object in question (see also A. Johnson 2003). The importance of generosity however, does not mean that unsolicited giving is common. To the contrary, such "altruism" is indeed infrequent and, apparently, it occurs principally within the household and then mainly in relation to the needs of children or at meals when morsels of food are shared (cf. O. R. Johnson 1980: 355). When something is given without any previous request, the handing-over of the gift is as a rule accompanied by the exclamative interjection "take it!" (*neri*/*nero*), as if the giver was beseeching the receiver to accept the object. Furthermore, there seems to be no simple concept in Matsigenka that corresponds to the English "gift." According to Snell (1998: 128), to talk about the reception of a gift requires the circumscription that "he/she gave it to me for no reason." If it is awkward to refuse a demand for sharing, it seems, however, to be even more awkward to refuse an unsolicited gift. In consequence, these kinds of transactions take place principally within the restricted circle of close kin and intimate friends within which relations are markedly non-hierarchical.

A few persons have a reputation for being lazy and people say of them that they prefer to ask relatives and neighbours for what they need rather than

15 Bodley (1973); Schäfer (1991); Killick (2008). – The *ayompari* relations between Matsigenka and Asháninka people on the Lower Urubamba, that Renard-Casevitz and Dollfus (1988) and Renard-Casevitz (2002) discuss, have no parallel in the Upper Urubamba area.

produce these things themselves. When people talk about "greed" (*michatagantsi*), it seems to be this kind of person whom they have in mind and not those who hoard possessions since they are virtually nonexistent. Generally, people try to avoid greedy persons. If someone reputed of being lazy should approach, people usually hide the things that they think may be looked-for by the miserly one – which, apparently, primarily consist of food, especially meat.

Salt constitutes an exception to the generally easy availability of local products considered to be necessary for the maintenance of reasonable living standards. Formerly, the salt Matsigenka people used mainly came from the Cerro de la Sal (Mountain of Salt), situated several days of travel downriver from the Upper Urubamba. Salt from the Cerro de la Sal has been traded widely in the area and information on the trade networks is abundant.[16] However, for Matsigenka people of the Upper Urubamba information on such commerce is conspicuously absent.[17]

Matsigenka people from the Upper Urubamba used to travel to the Cerro de la Sal during the dry season of the year, at least until the 1960s to extract salt from the deposits found there. Access to these sources of salt was open since it was considered to be a gift from the gods (Santos-Granero and Barclay 1998: 28). When people returned home from these expeditions, the salt was distributed to the immediate social universe of the extractors without any thought of material compensation.

In spite of the significance and prevalence of sharing, interested exchange is a known phenomenon and a number of concepts that can be translated as "to give," "to receive," and "to share" can also be rendered as "to sell" (e.g., *pimantagantsi*) and "to receive payment" (e.g., *neakotagantsi*). It is my impression though that comments upon "selling" and "receiving payment" primarily are restricted to accounts of relations with non-Matsigenka people while acts described as "giving," "receiving," and "sharing" are common in everyday events. I lack substantial evidence for this supposition other than that I have no memory of having heard the expressions used differently. To corroborate my hunch, I reviewed Snell's Matsigenka-Spanish dictionary (1998) where different forms of the verb *punatagantsi* are translated as both "to pay" and "to cost." The phrases Snell presents to illustrate the employment of the word all refer to relations with non-Matsigenka people,[18] while the corresponding usage of other exchange related verbs refer only to acts of giving and sharing among Matsigenka people.[19] Arguably, these examples indicate that a distinction is made between transactions with fellow Matsigenka – which principally means within groups of closely related people – and with non-Matsigenka – which means people outside of the socially intimate circles. The condition that exchanges with non-Matsigenka people consist of White people things, while exchanges within the socially intimate sphere consist not only of Matsigenka people things, that is, food and objects locally produced, but also include White people things, is arguably a sign of that the kind of social relationship involved is of essence. Significantly, transactions among close relatives are based on sentiments of mutual trust and concern and material gains are of little significance while gain is a crucial factor in transactions with people outside of the intimate circle. To distinguish between the two modes of transactions I here reserve the term "sharing" for the former kind of interchange, while interested exchange simply is given as "exchange" (see also Woodburn 1998). Importantly and in accordance with theoretical notions, the two forms of transactions are indicative of the social relationship between those involved. In exchange it is primarily the article sold or acquired that is of consequence for the transaction and the trading partner as such is replaceable, while in sharing the transaction is motivated by the social bonds that link the parties to each other.[20] However, as the negative attitude towards "lazy" people referred to above attests, the affective implications of sharing do not mean that such transactions are entirely without economic significance.

To Matsigenka people sharing is, of course, a way of distributing things, but to allow another the right to things of one's own goes beyond the mere satisfaction of a material need. Since the manufacture of things involves the incorporation of something of oneself in the object, it also signifies that the receiver obtains access to the producer through this element. Sharing thus requires a trustful rela-

16 Cf. Renard-Casevitz (2002); Santos-Granero (2004); Tibesar (1950); Varese (1973).

17 Renard-Casevitz (1992) presents three Matsigenka myths that deal with salt, two of which refer to local trade in this object. Significantly, these two myths were both recollected in Kirigeti, far down the Lower Urubamba River and close to Yine (Piro) and Asháninka settlements, while the third, the one that does not mention trade, is from the Upper Urubamba region.

18 The phrases are "My brother was working for a White man (*virakocha*) who did not pay him …" and "I wanted to get a piece of cloth but when I went [to the trader or shop] it cost too much …" (Snell 1998: 189).

19 In these cases, Snell's examples all refer to exchanges of food between close relatives.

20 Cf. Hunt (2002); Overing (1992); Price (1975); Rival (2002).

tion and it is, accordingly, a way of expressing and strengthening the moral community within which one ought to be safe and secure. In case of a serious conflict within a household, one part usually moves elsewhere (Rosengren 2000), bringing along his or her personal belongings to avoid being attacked through these objects. The potential to harm people that follows from having access to things they have made can, for instance, be exploited by sorcerers for whom even a simple footprint may suffice. Sharing accordingly serves to generate and uphold relations of trust and intimacy. Thus, although economic and affective functions may seem distinct from a modern Western perspective, to Matsigenka people they constitute but aspects of the same phenomenon, which, essentially, defines the nature of the ties that unite persons who are closely related. Consequently, sharing is associated with those who recognise mutual ties, generated through bonds of compassion and sentiments of trust and decency, that are based on feelings of a personal as well as common responsibility to maintain the tranquillity and order of everyday life (Rosengren 2000). In order to uphold a good and ordered existence, basic material needs must be satisfied and if they cannot be produced by an individual household, most needs can be catered for through the sharing of assets held by the various members of the group of intimate relations. Objects that remain outside of this circumscribed sphere of sharing are primarily of foreign manufacture and White people things are usually the most coveted. Things of this kind are as a rule acquired through exchange with persons with whom no sharing relation exists. In contrast to sharing, exchange with persons outside the intimate sharing group is basically asymmetric, as it revolves around yearned for objects of restricted accessibility which produces competition and strife and they are, thus, potentially dangerous. Arguably, this negative attitude towards exchange with people outside of the intimate sharing group follows from historical experiences at the same time as it generates and sustains the widespread reluctance to enter into this kind of relationship.

Befriending White People

Although the possibility of getting access to White people things generally has been bleak from a Matsigenka perspective, it has never been an option to remain passive. The rubber boom meant the very first encounter with large numbers of White people to which some Matsigenka reacted by withdrawing further into the protection of the forest though the majority remained in the areas where they used to live in spite of White people's presence. Some remained because they were forced to do so, while others remained by their own choice. Arguably, one motive for staying was that the proximity provided a possibility for access to White people things. Whatever the reason for staying, local White people had to be handled both to facilitate Matsigenka people's continued permanence under as favourable conditions as possible and for the possibility to obtain White people things. Amazon peoples have devised many and various strategies for reaching this end; most of them being related to the local situation at hand (Virtanen 2009). Some strategies are, however, more general: marriage, for instance, constitutes one such common scheme which leads to what in current anthropological parlance is known as "familiarising the Other," that is, making the Other similar to oneself and part of ordinary, everyday life; the process of assimilation thus works both ways and marriage eventually turns the two "affines" into "family." "Familiarisation" is, however, a time-consuming project and the result, moreover, is notoriously unpredictable and requires the continuous exposure of the White person to human influences.[21] Experience demonstrates that few White people marry Matsigenka people and when they do they usually maintain a social and frequently also a geographical distance to the Matsigenka community. Moreover, if the "familiarisation" is successful, the White person would become just like another Matsigenka. The only thing gained from this transformation would be the domestication of that particular person, while the productive asymmetry following from White peoples' access to things produced by a superior technology at the same time were lost.

A way to avoid excessive "familiarisation" while still maintaining a relation to White people is found in the institution of *compadrazgo*, or godparentage, that is, White people's own system of fictive kinship. The establishment of *compadrazgo* is advantageous in several respects: effects are almost instantaneous and the crucial differences are maintained in spite of the greater social intimacy that the relationship entails. The important differences between

21 A locally well-known example of how this marriage strategy may backfire is Fidél Pereira (approximately 1885–1974), a local *patrón*, who married a large number of Matsigenka women without it making him more controllable despite he himself being the result of a union between a White man and a Matsigenka woman. On the contrary, these marriages helped Pereira to establish a social position from which he was able to dominate large parts of the Upper Urubamba mountain until his death.

White and Matsigenka people can consequently be maintained while the hierarchical dimension in the relationship is controlled to the extent that it does not mean subjugation.

The *compadrazgo* institution is well known to Matsigenka people since at least the beginning of the 20th century when religious missionaries first established themselves permanently in the Upper Urubamba area.[22] The missionaries' arrival thus coincided more or less with the peak of the rubber boom. The suffering and increasingly precarious situation of the indigenous peoples of western Amazonia during this period is well known and Matsigenka people were in no way spared the horrors. In the Urubamba River region, religious missionaries tried to protect indigenous peoples from the exploitation and harsh treatment of White rubber barons and *hacendados* (cf. Fernández Moro 1952). To establish *compadrazgo* relations between Matsigenka and White people was believed by the missionaries to generate a degree of mutual respect and benevolence. In contrast, to rubber barons and farmers it may be assumed that godparentage was considered a way to create bonds of dependence and subordination, while to Matsigenka people it was a manner to formalize friendly bonds. To all involved the institution thus carried prospective benefits.

As can be expected, *compadrazgo* has been observed also among the neighbouring indigenous peoples in the region. However, there are obvious differences in how godparentage is understood locally. Peter Gow's (1991) observation that *compadrazgo* principally is a social relation between the *compadres*, that is, between the parents of the child and its godparents rather than a relation between the child and its godparents, is, though, most likely general to the area. Gow (1991: 173 ff.) notes, moreover, that *compadrazgo* among Piro people serves as a means for adult men to transform distant, non-kin relations among coresidents into a quasi-kin/quasi-affinal relation that provides a measure of intimacy and loyalty. In effect, the choice of a child's godparents is done from the perspective of the father's social network. In contrast to Matsigenka people's preference for White godparents, Piro people's godparents are married couples who live in the same village as the child's parents where the man is of approximately the same age as the child's father and situated in a socially similar position.[23]

Among Asháninka and Ashéninka people, other neighbours to the Matsigenka, the godparent institution has been considered to be of less importance than it is among both Matsigenka and Piro people. However, one finds among Asháninka and Ashéninka people the above-mentioned institution known as *ayompari*, a term that etymologically can be derived from the Spanish word "*compadre*" (Schäfer 1991: 50; Hvalkof y Veber 2005: 228). The *ayompari* relation has conventionally been viewed primarily as a trading relation, but according to Evan Killick (2009) the relationship is more complex as it contains a strong moral element of trust and loyalty as well. In this respect, Killick argues, the *ayompari* relation parallels the *compadrazgo* institution in constituting a solid social bond based on principles other than those of kinship and affinity.

The significance of such non-kinship-based relations have for a long time been overlooked and Santos-Granero (2007) argues for the need to find an alternative to the present emphasis on either relations of kinship or affinity, conviviality or predation, in attempts to understand Amazonian sociality. To overcome the rigid opposition between these positions, he calls attention to friendship as an interstitial institution. With regard to forms of friendship, Santos-Granero identifies (2007: 2) three spheres in which friendship is established. One is the sphere of "familial others," another is "neighbouring others," and the third one, and the one of particular interest here, is the sphere of "foreign others," a category that consists of those who are socially external and who as such form a group of potential enemies.

This latter group is obviously the one that would contain White people in the Matsigenka social universe. Santos-Granero's conceptual model may, therefore, contribute to clarify the kind of relationship that lies at the basis of *compadrazgo* relations among Matsigenka people. In this context, it should be noted that according to Matsigenka people godparents are seen to have the same kind of influence upon the forming of the children as baptism. Lately, such an influence has been noted also with regard to, for instance, Ashéninka (Killick 2009), Cashinahua (McCallum 2001), Yine (or Piro) (Opas 2008), and Warí people (Vilaça 2011). Among Matsigenka people there is, moreover, such a spiritual link also between the adults which, besides the possibility to

22 Paul Marcoy describes (1875/I: 422) what must have been one of the earliest baptisms of Matsigenka children, taking place in 1846. This baptism was undertaken on the initiative of the priest who accompanied the expedition in which Marcoy participated. Interestingly the ritual included the appointment of a pair of godparents from among the European expedition members who concluded the baptism with the distribution of gifts to the Matsigenka present.

23 Opas (2008: 262) observes though that for the Yine, or Piro, in the Manú area many parents prefer foreign people to become godparents to their children (see also note 24 below). It can, moreover, be noted that Gow himself is *compadre* to several Piro families (Gow 2001: 42 f., 258).

get access to White people things, is one of the effects that make the institution of interest to the parents of the baptised children.

Since the relation between Matsigenka and White people is one of inequality, the establishment of *compadrazgo* may be felt as problematic. The relationship is initiated by the Matsigenka parents who seek out potential candidates among White people known to them. Familiarity and/or a positive disposition towards local people are considered to be crucial criteria. If the parents are acquainted with the potential candidates, the better, but also persons only known to be friendly towards local people are approached if better alternatives are lacking. This means that the overwhelming majority of the candidates are people with some kind of local base in the neighbourhood like, for instance, shop keepers, missionaries, and frequently returning anthropologists, that is, people who all are notable for possessing skills that presumably have given them access to what locally is considered to be exceptional amounts of wealth and influence. The candidates' ties to the locality is crucial since it is a precondition for the establishment of a sufficient degree of intimacy required for the mutual influence upon the personal constitution of the parties involved as well as the maintenance of the sharing relation since demand sharing requires a social closeness for the demands to be accepted.

Matsigenka peoples' preference for White persons as godparents differs in relation to the first choice of both Piro and Asheninka people who rather have persons from their own people to serve as *compadres* or *ayompari* partners.[24] This disparity can hardly be explained by any difference in how these three peoples socially relate to White people. Rather, I would suggest that the Matsigenka preference principally is associated with their limited access to White people things in combination with cosmological understandings of the origin and constitution of White and human people. Piro, Asheninka, and Asháninka people have well-established channels of access to White people things: the former have been engaged in trade with White people for centuries and the *ayompari* system of the Asheninka and Asháninka also include White and mestizo people. However, it can be observed that the three different forms of godparentage referred to above all stress some form of equality either as co-parents, social equals, or faithful trading partners that allows for a sense of trust, closeness, and security.

To Matsigenka people, this similitude is only partial, however, since White people, being the creation of Kentibákori, are not *matsigenka*, that is, they are not human people but belong to the category of *tsori*. Members of this category are characterised by their similarity to other kinds of beings in the way that White people are similar to humans. The similarity is, though, only superficial: since *matsigenka* and White people are of different origin, they have different aptitudes and capabilities to handle the surrounding world. Moreover, in line with the events described in the myth about Yavíreri referred to above, White people have access to objects made by a superior technology, which gives them their superior social position since they are materially richer and politically more powerful. These differences are crucial since it is from them that Matsigenka people profit as they strategically take advantage of the relationship. The inherent productivity in the combination of differences is also the reason why generally one would avoid "familiarising" White people too thoroughly as that process means the obliteration of differences. Hence, the vantage with co-parentage is the condition that asymmetry is maintained at the same time as a sufficiently close social relation is produced between the parties to allow for the establishment of a sharing relationship, which results in the empowerment of the Matsigenka partner through the access to White people things that thus is enabled.

Compadrazgo and Sharing

When the potential candidates for godparentage have accepted their appointment, the child to be baptised should at the proper time be brought to the place for the baptism ritual and from there on the godparents and the priest take over. The officiating priest is of prime importance in this ritual, as it is he who makes the godparent relationship come into existence. Without him and his performance the relationship would not turn into one of godparentage.[25]

24 Killick (2008: 312) found though that in the Asheninka communities in which he worked mestizo timber men have become preferred *ayompari* partners (see also note 23 above). Hanne Veber (pers. com.) notes concurringly that *compadrazgo* with White people is presently beginning to spread among riverine Asháninka groups.

25 According to Killick (2008: 321) baptism can be dispensed with among Asheninka people for the establishment of godparent relations. Among Evangelical Yine (Piro) people who practice adult baptism the godparent relation is established through other kinds of rituals, such as the cutting of the umbilical cord and the first haircut of the child (Opas 2008: 259). In contrast, among Matsigenka people baptism is of crucial importance and to dispense with it would be to miss out on the transformation of the child's personal qualities.

After the act of baptism, there is not really much that happens to manifest the new relationship besides a meal to which the baptised child's parents invite the *compadres*. This act of eating together may seem inconspicuous, but, in common with many Amazonian peoples, commensality serves as a significant transformative act producing sociable and even intimate relations.[26] Even though one common meal is insufficient to generate intimacy, this meal is an act that underwrites the new relationship and the increased social proximity between the parties produced by the ritual. From now on, the adults may address each other as *compadres*, but equally well they may continue to address each other in the same way that they did before entering the godparent relationship. In any case, the new relation allows Matsigenka parents to consort more intensely with their *compadres*. The persons involved are, as a result, mutually linked together by emerging bonds of affection produced by the increased closeness manifested in visiting and small gifts. From my *compadres* I often receive fruit from their gardens while I present them with biscuits, candies, and soda pop. At the same time as the parties become more closely attached to each other, they maintain a social distance to the effect that the other remains an "Other" and the relationship continues to be a fertile one. Among Matsigenka people, *compadrazgo* is, accordingly, a manner of including "known others" in the social context of formalised friendship; it is a relation which expresses closeness but not the intimacy which is sentiments reserved for proper kin. The new kind of relationship signifies, however, that demands on the property of the *compadres* can be made and that it will be hard and improper to deny the requests.

Since requests for contributions commonly are considered private matters best kept within the household, I have little ethnographic material for illustration other than my own experience. The discretion with which demands are made is, however, in keeping with the strong insistence upon privacy that is a prominent trait in Matsigenka sociality.[27] The condition that requests preferably are made in privacy does not necessarily mean that asking is a matter of secrecy; rather it is one of social integrity. These transactions are the business only of those immediately concerned. Accordingly, the only time I have been asked for a contribution in public was some years ago at a communal meeting when I, "being like a *compadre* to the community," was entreated to provide money for a chain saw to be held in common by the members of the community. Arguably, the reason for the public nature of this request was that the chain saw was to befall to the community and the demand was thus made within the group of those immediately concerned.

Within the *compadrazgo* relationship two kinds of transactions take place: one kind follows from the godparents' vow to sustain the godchild given at the Christian ceremony, and the other follows from Matsigenka expectations on intimates and consists of expectations of sharing between *compadres*. Gifts given to godchildren are in this context of little significance, because it is very much up to the godparent to decide what and when to give. These gifts are, thus, unsolicited and they form part of the Christian and thus foreign understanding of the relationship. The other kind of transaction is part of the indigenous rationale for the relationship and it differs from the former in that the interchange is between the godparents. Although the relation is hierarchical the co-parenthood is mutual and both parts may make demands upon the other and, as a rule, requests are made in a confident and self-assured manner. Matsigenka demands are usually phrased indirectly like, for instance, "*Compadre*, I/we need X" or "*Compadre*, I would very much like to have X," although they can also be a bluntly straightforward "*Compadre*, give me your X." Irrespective of the phrasing no humility is shown, since even though there is an element of hierarchical asymmetry, the overriding mode of interrelating is that of intimacy. When it concerns money, which, I believe, is fairly rare, the petition is presented as a request for a loan in order to enable the realisation of particular projects. Thus, I have been asked to provide money to buy, for instance, fodder for raising chickens and a stock of clothes to sell in communities downriver. In all instances, though, when solicitations are made I have been addressed as "*compadre*." The kind and quality of the relationship is accordingly underscored since otherwise my given name is commonly used to address me. In a similar fashion, a local shopkeeper is addressed as "*Señora*" when conversing with her and when buying things in her shop. However, when credit is solicited she is addressed as "*comadre*" by those who have established such a relationship with her. Evidently, the addressee employ the godparent term of address to remind the addressed of the relation who thus interpellated is compelled to take account of the associated moral expectations in order to facilitate the acceptance of the supplication.

When demands for material objects are made, there are no hints of any idea of compensation, nei-

26 Cf. Fausto (2002); McCallum (2001); Oakdale (2008); Overing and Passes (2000).

27 Cf. A. Johnson (2003); O. R. Johnson (1980); Rosengren (2000).

ther at the moment of request nor in the future. Even though this may suggest that the item received is understood as a gift, this is probably erroneous. First, as seen above, there is no notion that could be rendered "gift," since the expression in Matsigenka that comes closest stresses that the presentation was done for no reason and, thus, no strings are attached. Secondly, to demand an object simultaneously implies an acknowledgement of a social relation where both parties may make demands on the other. This right to make demands inheres in the closeness of the social relation and there is no notion of balance in regard to the number of transactions or in regard to value. The right is rather a right of sharing in the possessions of those that share the intimate relation. However, demands can only be made of material objects (including money) and never of services, which belong to a sphere of relationships that excludes godparent relations.

Since the sharing relation is one of trust and social closeness, demands are often made considering the situation of the giver and, thus, unreasonable demands are normally not made. This means for my part that few requests are made until my departure from the community is approaching, when suddenly requests for things like my shirts, shoes, torches, batteries, pens, etc. radically increase. At these occasions, people turn up in the evening for a chat and at the same time they ask for the thing(s) they desire.

Conclusion

Even though Matsigenka people are familiar with reciprocal exchange, sharing within intimate groups of close kin and friends is of overriding importance as it generates and preserves good everyday life. Arguably, the prominence of sharing is associated with the insignificant degree of specialisation which means that any imbalance in the access to particular objects can be redressed easily within the group of people among whom demands can be made. A major drawback of this system is, however, that it does not allow for access to objects of foreign provenance, such as White people things. To this end, various strategies to approach and befriend White people have been conceived, one of which is the employment of White peoples' godparent institution.

The mutuality inherent in the local version of the *compadrazgo* relationship signifies that it provides a possibility to arrange a flow of goods and services in two directions. Marilyn Strathern (1988: 14) notes that a dyad, like the one formed by the godparent relationship, exists only as a consequence of the differentiation of its parts and that the existence of one side in the relation obliges the existence of the other. Otherness is, in accordance, a prerequisite for godparentage which from the Matsigenka perspective is what provides the institution with its attraction. To Matsigenka people it is consequently the hierarchical asymmetry that inheres from White people's superior powers and access to a more advanced technology that makes the co-parent relation productive. Hence, it is the possibility of maintaining a stable relation characterised by alterity and asymmetry that makes godparentage interesting. Moreover, with the help of this Christian institution the potentially conflictive element in alterity is neutralised. Matsigenka people's choice of establishing *compadrazgo* relations is thus strategic, since it allows the kind of disinterested sharing characteristic of interchange within the circle of intimates to be extended beyond this group to include "foreign others." Thus, while *compadres* maintain social distance, the relationship emulates the intimacy of the close socialising group and godparents are invited to partake in the sharing of resources *almost* as if they were members of this group. Correspondingly, as White *compadres* enter the relationship, they are expected to make available parts of their assets to their Matsigenka co-parents who thereby indirectly get access to White people things. The co-parent relationship signifies accordingly that White persons can be subjected to the moral conditions that are part of the intimacy that defines the group of sharing people. To Matsigenka people this interchange is obviously to their advantage because of the power asymmetry that follows from White peoples' and their things' superiority. The imbalance in the value of the exchanged goods is considered unproblematic, since the parties' different needs and capacities to contribute should be accepted because of the relationships' social closeness – which accords with practices within the sharing network. Hence, Matsigenka people use White people to attain their own ends: the co-option of the *compadrazgo* institution is, from a Matsigenka perspective, *both* a means whereby they to some extent can befriend White persons *and* a strategy to get access to White people things through the establishment of sharing relations in spite of the social asymmetry. What may be thought to be a manifestation of Westernisation, thus remains within a Matsigenka frame of understanding.

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