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SOCIAL STRUCTURE IN THE BRASILIAN UAUPES

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to present a cohesive model of social structure for the Eastern Tukanoan peoples of the Uaupés River basin in the Brazilian and Colombian Amazon.

As in other Lowland South American social systems deep genealogies are absent in the Uaupés (Murphy 1979). Yet the Uaupés system differs from many Lowland South American systems in that it is highly structured, with unilineality one of several integrating structural principles. Although Uaupés social systems have been called segmentary (see, for example, Jackson 1976), this paper attempts to show that the label fails to characterize the system accurately, and, furthermore, ignores other essential organizing principles that make the system unique.

The fieldwork on which this paper was based was carried out between 1978 and 1981 in Brasil among the Uanano of the middle Uaupés. The focus of the paper, however, is not simply Uanano social structure, although Uanano examples will be used to illustrate many points, but rather the larger Uaupés social structure, of which the Uanano are a component part.

In the first part of the paper, Uaupés social structure will be described as a system of vertical, exogamous, and hierarchically ordered descent groups which are intersected by intermarrying, horizontal status classes, here termed "Generation Classes" (for reasons which will become clear below). Within the descent group relations are governed by kinship and characterized by dominance and subordination. Between descent groups

relationships are governed by marriage (actual or potential), which can only take place between status equals. Themes of siblingship and seniority underlie the total system.

Later in the paper I will relate this analysis to those of researchers who report on the Colombian Uaupés. My analysis departs from theirs in its stress on rank and on horizontal linkages between groups, rather than on descent per se, but I hope to show that these very departures can confirm the model. Finally, I will compare this structure to classical segmentary systems in order to highlight the combination of properties that is unique to the societies of the Uaupés area.

UAUPÉS SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The "Phratry." Marriage rules, preferences, and prohibitions determine relations between the autonomous language groups of the Uaupés basin. Each language group may be said to stand in affinal or agnatic relation to every other language group.

The distinction between agnates and marriageables is expressed in the kinship terminology (see below). Affinal groups are further subdivided into those with whom prescriptive cross-cousin marriage and sister exchange create on-going alliances and those who may be best described as "in-laws of in-laws" (for more information on this, see Jackson 1972, Hugh-Jones 1979, and Chernela 1982).

Where marriage prohibitions exist between groups, siblingship is the metaphor that creates a sentiment of unity. Thus, e.g., the Uanano are one of five autonomous language groups between whom agnatic kin terms are used

and marriage is prohibited. In the absence of inter-marriage there is no basis for reciprocity between language groups. No structure of mutual obligation binds them together and contact between them is minimal. Despite an ideology of brotherhood, the five groups share no common name and claim no common ancestor. This phratry-like grouping cannot therefore be called a true descent group. The highest ordered group that can be so-called is the language group, although here too the dominant metaphor is sibingship rather than filiation.

The Language Group. The highest-ordered, named group of affiliation is the unit conventionally known in the literature as the "language group," or the tribe (but see Hugh-Jones 1979 and Goldman 1979 for comparison). Although there exist exceptions, the language group is an exogamous unit whose most salient identifying feature (to the Indians as well as to outside observers) is its language. Unanos, Tukanos, Desanos, Piratapuaia, Bara, Cubeo, Barasana, and other groups reported in the literature, are among the fifteen to twenty such language groups (the number depending upon definitions of group boundaries and on the total area considered) which form the constituent components in the integrating system here described.

Ideally, the villages of a language group form a geographic unity. In the case of the Brazilian Unano, their ten villages are aligned along an uninterrupted stretch of river.

The language group is conceptualized by its members as a group of agnates who trace descent from a set of ancestral founding brothers, among whom the founding Eldest Brother is the focal ancestor of the entire group. The ancestral siblings are all ranked according to seniority which is specified in the origin traditions of each sib, thereby uniting the entire language group in a comprehensive hierarchy.

The Sib. Sibs are named, localized descent groups whose members view themselves as the descendants of one of the language group founding ancestral siblings. The sib is the only social group in the Uaupés whose membership is conceptualized in terms of descent. A sib is spoken of as "the grandchildren of one man." Genealogies are not kept. Rather, the naming system governs group membership.

Membership in a sib would appear to be automatic on the basis of patrilineal descent alone. Yet in a jural sense one is not a member of a sib until one receives the sib name. Only by receipt of the sib name does an individual become "alive" in the social sense. He is given his "breath" when he is given his sib name, and his breath, his life, is the life-breath of the sib ancestor whose name he bears. Through the name the ancestor endows the recipient with his basic right to social life and to a particular place and set of privileges in the group (economic, ritual and social). The recipient, in turn, owes to his ancestor, and to his living social group, the responsibility of living up to his name and all its attendant responsibilities.

Perpetuation of sib life (and individual social life in the balance) is thus accomplished through a process of exchange. To a Uanano the bearer of an ancestral name is the "exchange" for that ancestor: Biali co?totaro is ancestor Biali's "exchange," his incarnation in the present. (Co?totaro, 'the exchanged one,' is from the same verb stem used to describe other sorts of exchanges, e.g., sister exchange.) Ancestor and descendant mutually create one another's life. Through the name the recipient becomes a truly human, social being, while the ancestor is given a living incarnation and thus continued life in the society.

Names are the property of the sibs, each of which owns a limited set of names which are unique to themselves and which cannot be used by members of any other sib (although within a sib more than one person may bear the same name simultaneously). A first-born son takes the name of his grandfather (who took the name of his grandfather, etc.). Later-born sons may take any of the names belonging to (the ancestral) grandfather's younger brothers. As siblings, ancestral and living, are always ranked according to seniority, so are the names themselves, each carrying an inherent, and invariant, connotation of rank. A name does not simply reflect one's rank, it also validates it. Thus a chief, the first-born (of the first-born, etc.) of the First-Born, receives a First-Born name, and thereby establishes his position in the hierarchy.

The consequences of these beliefs and practices for the social structure are crucial. By virtue of the exchange principle which cycles ranked names down through the generations, time is effectively eliminated from the system, such that the social system replicates itself in every generation. Clearly, this is very different from a classic segmentary model.

The Lineage Question. Again, in contrast to the segmentary system, it is the sib, the name-owning group, rather than the lineage, which is the fundamental unit of Uanano society. When de facto segments arise in sibs, as occurs when a local sib splits, the bud group is denied a new identity. The phrase used to describe the sib, literally "one man's grandchildren," could logically be applied to a unit smaller than the sib, yet the term is considered to be absolutely inappropriate in reference to units below the sib level and to use it so is offensive and antisocial. For the Unanos, sib sub-segments are like undesirable caucuses: they arise only in time of difficulty and they threaten group unity.

Systems of Nomenclature

Like other Uaupés groups, Uananos have a Dravidian kin terminology in accord with the structure of patrilineal descent and cross-cousin marriage. Terminologically "own group" (agnates) are separated from "other group" (affines). (Note also that the terminology is only three generations deep, that is, no special terms exist for relatives in either the fourth ascending or the fourth descending generation.)

Degrees of collaterality are not distinguished in the terminology but collateral relatives are differentiated according to seniority. Among Uanano, for example, all of ego's and ego's father's siblings are divided into "older" and "younger." The operative rule is that first born is senior to second-born, and so on down the line; and that the descendants of first-born ancestors are senior to descendants of later-born ancestors. The basis of the terminology is thus inherited seniority, rather than actual age.

Through this system members of consanguineal groups at both the language group and the sib level are ranked in relation to one another, the senior being the higher rank. The order of seniority is fixed and is constantly reiterated in the obligatory terms of address used by agnates in greeting. Whenever agnates meet, they are obliged to greet each other using kin terms which necessarily reflect the relative status of the speakers, (as, e.g., Elder Brother, Younger Brother).

Generational Classes. In addition to the agnatic kin terminology, which is used between individuals and groups within the same language group stratum, there is a second system of classification which utilizes generational nomenclature to indicate hierarchical distance. For lack of a better term I will call this a system of Generation Classes.

Generational Class terminology is used in two ways. On the one hand it serves as a classificatory scheme in which all the sibs of a language group are classified as groups, into "Grandchildren," "Uncles," and "Grandparents." These groups are ranked, Grandchildren, interestingly, being the highest in rank, Uncles in the middle, and Grandparents at the bottom of the scale. According to this scheme every sib in the area has an absolute status such that any other sib might say, for example, "They are Grandfathers."

Within the descent group, this classificatory scheme also ties into a system of reference and address in which five generational terms are applied reciprocally across the three strata, in the following manner (for convenience only masculine forms are given):

Generation Class of speaker:	Class of Addressee		
	Grandchild	Uncle	Grandparent
Grandchild	Brother	Uncle	Grandparent
Uncle	Nephew	Brother	Uncle
Grandparent	Grandchild	Nephew	Brother

The concept of Generation Class structures relationships both within and between descent (language) groups. Within a language group, Generation Class relations are based on dominance|subordination. Between language groups they are based upon equivalence.

Within the language group, the concept of Generation Class can structure a whole range of behavior and expectations, both economic and symbolic, as the following case will show.

A Case of Generation Class Pairing in Practice. The 1,600 Uanano peoples are divided into twenty-five sibs. Each sib possesses a unique repertoire of oral traditions relating to its founding ancestor, plus the suffix -pona, meaning 'children of.' The twenty-five sibs are arranged in order from one to twenty-five. The first ten sibs are known collectively as the Wamisima, literally 'Older Brothers.' Sibs eleven to fifteen (possibly with additional sibs in Colombia) are collectively termed Tibajana, 'Younger Brothers.' The remaining sibs, sixteen through twenty-five, are known as Wiroa (meaning the perching bird pipridae) and are referred to as "Servants." In terms of Generation Class, the Wamisima are classified as Grandchildren; Tibahana as Uncles, and Wiroa as Grandparents.

Most of my fieldwork was conducted in two neighboring Uanano villages, Yapima and Soma. All the sibs in Yapima belong to the Wamisima (older Brothers), while the Soma sibs are all Wiroa. Residents in both villages agree that the Yapima sibs are "Chiefly," while the Soma sibs are "Servants," by virtue of ancestral precedent. (Buoyero, the founding Eldest Brother of the Wiroa, is said to have been the servant of Muktiyero, the founding Eldest Brother of the Wamisima.) In address Yapima residents call Soma residents "grandpa" regardless of particular sib or relative age. ("Grandpa" as a term of address conveys familiarity and is not the same as "grandfather," which is a term of respect. Soma residents, correspondingly, address Yapima residents as "grandchildren.")

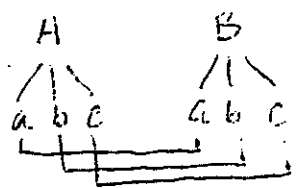
Until recently, the Wiroas of Soma resided in Yapima, and according to informants of both Chiefly and Servant groups, performed services for the Chiefly sibs such as agricultural labor, house construction, and

fish-weir maintenance. In turn, they received a percentage of the weir harvest, and the use of Yapima lands for planting gardens of their own.

Thirty years ago, the Yapima sibs invited the Wiroa groups to settle at one of their downriver waterfalls where a large fish-weir facility required high inputs of man-power was located. In return for utilizing Yapima fishing resources and instruments, the Soma sibs supply fish and services to Yapima when called upon. I saw several occasions when Soma individuals participated in house construction at Yapima.

Generation Class and Marriage. As has been shown above, the internal structures of each of the language groups is identical. Each is composed of sibs which are ranked from First to Last, and classified according to Generation Class.

Marriage can only occur between sibs of the same Generation Class, and, of course, different language groups. Thus the Grandchild sibs of language group A exchange wives with the Grandchild sibs of language groups B, C, etc.



Handwritten note: A B = exogamous language groups = Generation Class

It will be recalled that 'kin terms' can only be used between members of "brother" groups, i.e., belonging to the same Generation Class. Thus, the daughter of a man from mother's language group, can only be considered a MBD, and hence marriageable, if she is of the same Generation Class as mother (and thus ego himself, presuming that his father married appropriately). If she is not of the same Generation Class, she is referred to not as a cross-cousin, but rather by the Generation Class that applies to her sib. In this vein I have heard young people chastised for flirting with inappropriate partners, and told that the

object of their intentions is not a "cross-cousin," -- although by straightforward genealogical reckoning this would be the case -- but an "Uncle," Aunt," or Grandparent."

DISCUSSION

When the data reported here are compared to other research from the Uaupés area, a number of important patterns emerge.

First, my data stress rank and horizontal linkages which cross-cut descent, whereas earlier works on the Uaupés, based upon Colombian cases, have emphasized segmentary descent and egalitarian principles. Two exceptions are the recent works of Goldman and Hugh-Jones. Together with my own work, these exceptions suggest an explanation for the apparent divergences.

Hugh-Jones (1979) presents a model in which Uaupés descent groups are sub-divided into local units of five functionally-interdependent sibs, each performing a specialized role. She finds sibs belonging to two of these roles (shaman and chanter) and postulates from informants recollections the "missing roles of chiefs, warriors, and servants" (p. 54). The Uanano provide concrete evidence for the existence of sibs in the named "chief" and "servant" categories, but suggests a pattern of localized interdependent pairs as opposed to local complements of five.

Even more recently, after a revisit to the Cubeo during which he worked among high-ranking sibs, Goldman (1981) presented a reanalysis in which he stresses rank much more than in his early reports based upon data derived from lower ranked groups, to the extent that he now characterizes the Uaupés system as an "elementary hereditary aristocracy" (p. 1). He presents an insightful and sensitive treatment of the symbolic

analogies underlying the relationship of Chief to Servant, or, as he also discovered, Grandchild to Grandparent, as it obtained in an earlier, hypothesized period.

Both of these reconstructions provide strong evidence for horizontal structures in the Uaupés, comparable, though not identical to organizations which I was able to observe in practice in the Brazilian Uaupés. Since the spatial distribution of rank groups is such that high-ranked groups are downriver, and low ranked groups upriver, the Brazilian Uaupés (i.e., downriver) is occupied by the highest ranked sibs and their accompanying "Servant" sibs. My own emphasis on rank reflects the emphasis given it by the Chiefly sib with whom I worked. The de-emphasis on rank in works derived from the Colombian (upper) Uaupés might be attributable to the absence of high-ranked groups in conformity with the Uaupés conceptual model of rank and space and further supports and simultaneously explains Hugh-Jones' "missing" chiefly and servant sibs.

It seems likely that rank structures will be preserved where privileges relating to rank are at stake. Furthermore, the Uanano data suggest that the Chiefly groups are corporate in terms of land, and that the Servant groups associated with them, landless.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In the Uaupés concepts of siblingship and seniority supercede that of true descent -- with significant structural consequences. Siblingship is the sentiment that unites agnatic groups at every level. Seniority is the concept that differentiates them, such that every individual within a sib, and every sib within a language group, stands in a fixed

rank relationship to every other. Through names the order of seniority is reproduced in each succeeding generation. The concept of Generation Class demarcates yet another form of relationship, which is like siblingship in that it is couched in the language of kinship, but distinct from siblingship in that it does not denominate actual kin relations. As the distinction between older and younger brother serves to rank individuals and groups in the descent system, so does the opposition Grandfather/Grandchild mark relative status (rank) in the Generation Class system (although in this system it is the younger term that signifies superiority). However, the most significant aspect of the Generation Class system is the way in which it serves to structure relationships between groups. Within the language group, the concept of Generation Class unites the highest and lowest rank sibs into an on-going relationship of dominance/subordination, which may at least sometimes take the form of land for service. Across language groups, sibs of the same Generation Class status are paired, as equals, in a continually renewed relationship based on the exchange of women.

Comparison to Classical Segmentary Systems. The basis of differentiation in this system lies in the sequential ordering of the sibling formations, not in the reckoning, through the keeping of genealogies, of distance to a relevant ancestor. Sibling-phrased rules differ from descent-phrased rules in that, in the case of the descent-phrased rule, each level is linked to its adjacent ones by intermediating ancestors. (This is not necessarily the case in the Uaupés system.) Without deep descent linking hierarchical levels, ramification with nested hierarchies cannot occur.

The primary link between ancestor and descendant in this system occurs through the name exchange, which precludes the keeping of genealogies. It is not simply that genealogies are forgotten. Rather, recycling of names eliminates genealogical history and provides an alternative structuring principle with a number of positive implications. Through the naming system, intrinsically assymetrical relationships are reproduced in every succeeding generation. The notion of descent is not deep and linear, it is cyclic and cannot be identified with descent as it is construed in ramifying systems based upon deep genealogies. A sib is not conceptualized as a chain of distinctive ancestors. Its dynamic is a cyclic rather than a linear one.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of complementary opposition, which is fundamental in defining the relations between subsidiary segments in ramifying systems cannot occur because sibling relationships are all inherently ranked, and, relatedly, no two sub-units can stand in equal relational distance to an apical ancestor.

Rather, differentiation is created in the Uaupés system in the following manner: 1) scaling and weighting through seniority; 2) the naming of groups by Generational Classes, 3) defining functionally-related pairs through kinship metaphor.

Insofar as the system is coherent it is so by means of 1) the strength of the sibling principles manifested in common sibhood and language; 2) the functional interdependence of its named units; and, 3) the exchange of females within generation classes.

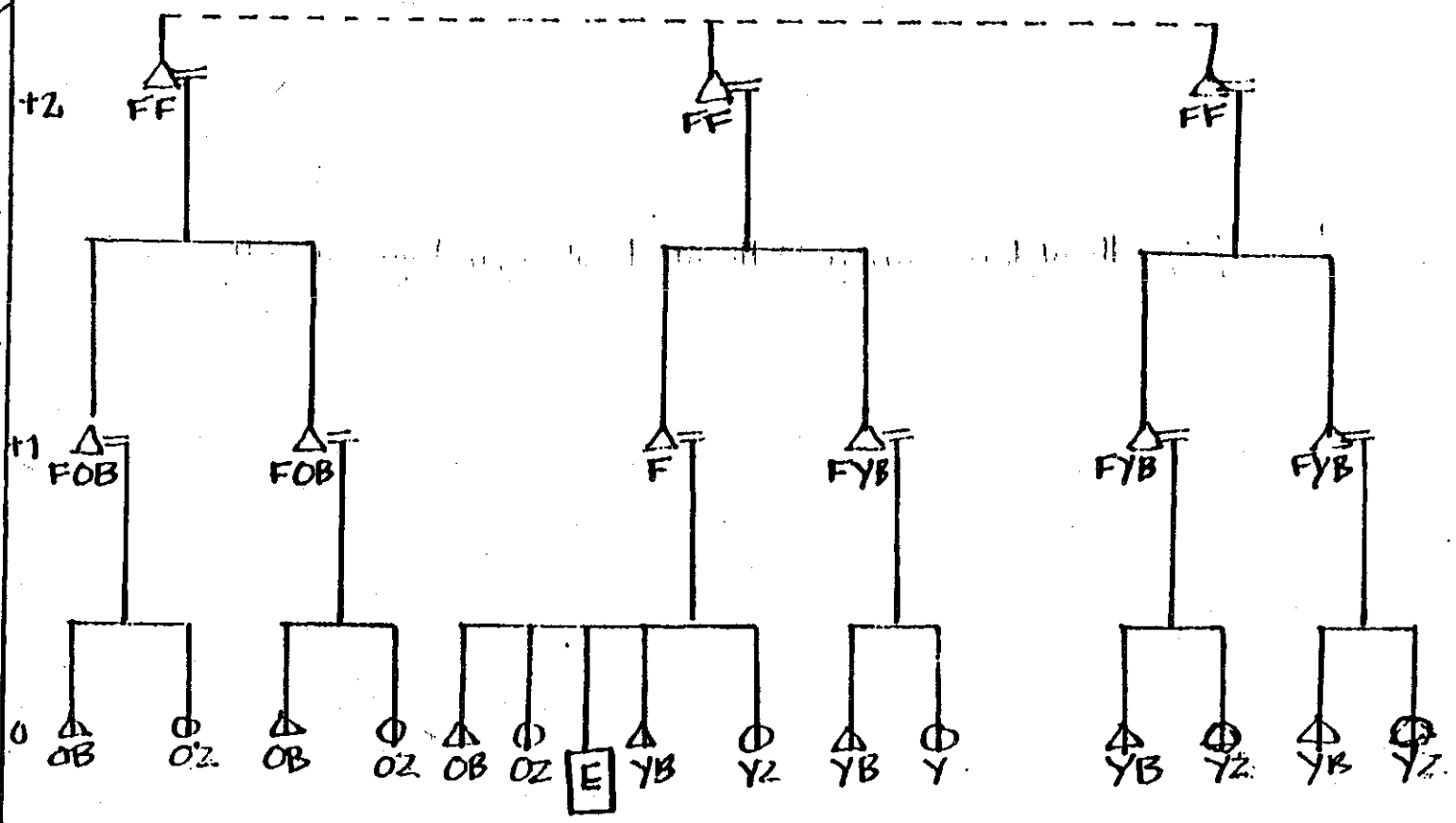
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Fig. 1
 Agnatic Terminology,
 demonstrating contrast w/ Bava (Bavosana/Cuba, Makun?) system

+2 generation.
 No rank indicators
 shown in
 terminology

Uonono terms
 for first ascending
 and zero generation,
 indicating
 seniority order



- FF = ñuchh
- FOB = pucami
- F = plicu
- FYB = pucubuu
- OB = wami
- OZ = wamio
- YB = bu·u
- YZ = ba·o

This terminology extends to all Uononos, and to all members of groups with whom the Uonono may not marry Epher (phratric member/oir)