VITALITY OF INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS

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Divine Child and Trademark: Economic, Morality, and Cultural Sustainability of a Guaraná Project among the Sateré-Mawé, Brazil

Wolfgang Kapfhammer

According to German anthropologist Richard Rottenburg (2001), in his article ‘The Culture of Development Collaboration in Africa’, the mode of communication between western and non-western partners involved in development collaboration could be called a ‘technical game’. Its leading differential is the distinction efficient/inefficient, while culture is at best referred to as ‘socio-cultural factors’. Culture could challenge the contents of the ‘technical game’ as the latter is based on the master narrative of progress and emancipation. Rottenburg draws on examples from Africa; in the Amazonian case I am relating here, it seems as if things would be just the other way round: the narrative the European partner adheres to testifies to scepticism against progress and valorisation of tradition. The ideal of ecological sustainability within this narrative is seen to be lived by the indigenous partner in an exemplary way; culture – as grounded in ‘local knowledge’ – is the basic rule within this game.

In an impressive ideological turnabout, the so-called ‘traditional populations’, especially those of Amazonia, have recently advanced from being an ‘obstacle’ to, or, at most, ‘candidates’ for progress and development, to becoming the ‘avant-garde’ of an increasingly sceptical modernity. This turnabout is due above all to the association of these populations with traditional knowledge, which have recently been revalorised by western modernity in the face of its own errors and its current efforts to preserve the environment and encourage the sustainable use of resources. This change of mind is based above all on the environmental ethics of western industrial societies, and, at the local level, has created a willingness to allow these ‘traditional populations’ to have control over wide territories in return for ‘environmental services’ (Carneiro da Cunha/Almeida 2001: 184).

To begin our discussion, in order to speak of ‘traditional populations’, one does not necessarily have to refer solely to indigenous groups, but rather a kind of modern ‘Erntevölker’. They are specialists in a certain crop, such as rubber

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1 I wish to thank the Sateré-Mawé for their generous hospitality and support and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft for funding my research.
tappers in the Brazilian state of Acre (like Chico Mendes; Schwartzman 1989), who, because of their economically sustainable production methods, meet western expectations with regard to preservation of the environment and bio-diversity. Here we are confronted with the first problem: the two partners involved in the process obviously adopt different perspectives, which may converge, at least ideally, but which are in no way identical. While in local terms, for example, something like the 'production of bio-diversity' or the 'production of nature' may be a contradiction in itself (because one cannot 'produce nature'), this is exactly what is expected, supported and concretely financed by supporting organisations (Carneiro da Cunha/Almeida 2001). Bio-diversity is a 'by-product' of a certain way of living, or in western economic terms, a 'positive externality', that is, a positive, external effect on an enterprise; however, it is usually ignored by the market (loc. cit.: 192). While there is a certain market for 'existential values' like bio-diversity and preservation of natural environments, the members of the so-called 'traditional populations' are by no means paid to act as 'guardians of nature parks'. A solution to this problem consists of the construction of a combination of high-quality forest products (supplied by the forest peoples) together with the global preservation of biological diversity (the main demand of western consumers) (loc. cit., see. Molnar/Scherr/Khare 2004).

For the actual indigenous groups of Amazonia, this package deal of territory in return for bio-diversity is not immediately relevant, insofar as indigenous land claims tend to be legally based on historical circumstances, at least according to the Brazilian Constitution. Nevertheless, it is becoming increasingly important for indigenous groups to come up with some valid answers to the question 'muita terra para pouco indio' (a lot of land for a few Indians). In the face of a very successful struggle by a demographically small minority (indigenous peoples comprise 0.5 per cent of Brazil's population but have gained control over 11 per cent of the country's territory) this question can be heard ever more frequently these days. Thus, a position such as 'environmental service provider' would carry some persuasive power. The guaraná project among the Sateré-Mawé, an indigenous group of some 8,000 people on the Middle Amazon River south of the city of Parintins, also has to do with the fact that the territory of this group forms the only existing biological gene-pool for the entire guaraná industry of Brazil (Fraboni 2001).

In this chapter I try to understand the cultural role of the guaraná fruit among the Sateré-Mawé by making inferences from the indigenous myth of origin of the plant and the discourse actually surrounding this myth, and from the 'mythopaxis' (Sahlin 1983, 1992; Friedman 1992) of a recent 'fair trade' project of the commercialisation of guaraná. Instead of a 'symbolic' analysis of guaraná mythology, which would misrepresent the cultural and social embedding of the project, I suggest an 'ethno-trophological' approach that associates qualities of this food with its consequences for the ontological and moral status of the consumer (see Hugh-Jones 1995, Fausto 2002), in order to understand the field of economic, social and political praxis, in which the project is unfolding. I will show that it is not primarily 'sustainable' human-nature-relations, commonly associated with tropical forest dwellers in an essentialist way, that can be held responsible for the acceptance of a successful project, but rather the embedding of project praxis in an encompassing strategy to establish certain social and moral standards within the context of an evangelical conversion movement. The profound societal changes accompanying conversion do not necessarily result, as might be expected, in the expectation of capitalistic pecuniary reward (as Max Weber would have suggested). The 'social capital' (Braun/Grote/Jütting 2000) invested in a market-oriented economy derives from a pre-existing indigenous potential for the universalistic construction of consensus as opposed to the particularism of a society differentiated into a number of exogamous clans.

Product Information

In Brazil guaraná is an ingredient and flavour of an immensely popular soft drink and forms an important part of the product range of big breweries such as Antarctica and Brahma. The vegetal raw material is produced on industrially managed plantations in Amazonia, particularly in the region of Maués, near the Area Indígena of the Satere-Mawe. There is a certain volume of export to the US; but mostly, distribution of the beverage is restricted to the Brazilian internal market. In Europe guaraná first held only a niche market as a kind of vegetal stimulant or 'upper'. Given this somewhat disreputable image, guaraná had a hard time establishing itself on the alternative eco-market which tried to push guaraná as a milder alternative to coffee and tea. Furthermore, only products from sustainable and ecologically acceptable cultivation were offered, and it was the 'ethical' quality of the trade, which offered Brazilian peasants adequate remuneration for their product, that was emphasised. At some point, another supplier entered this market, namely the Sateré-Mawé themselves, the originators of cultivation and processing of the guaraná fruit. Thus, a further promotional argument was added to the high product quality and sustainable cultivation: the 'authenticity' of an indigenous origin of the product. After having lost a viable position on the regional market many years ago (that is, petty trade to towns near the indigenous area; the Sateré not being involved in agroindustrial production of guaraná) the guaraná project of the Sateré-Mawé now distributes the beverage with increasing success to European markets (GTZ 2000).

Guanará (Paulinia cupana) prospers almost exclusively in Amazonia and is a bushy climbing plant that twines itself around the trunks of trees, or around racks made of wooden beams in the indigenous plantations. The fruit of Paulinia contains a relatively high concentration of caffeine, which is responsible for the stimulating and energising effect of the beverage. Because the caffeine is firmly bound to the fruit material, it is only slowly released into the organism and thus has a gentle but enduring effect (Henman 1982). Among the Sateré-Mawé, guaraná is traditionally cultivated in separate plantations, that is, distinct from the manioc plantations. When a new plantation is set up, or periodically renewed, new seedlings from wild forest varieties are introduced. In order to be able to reproduce and yield a good crop, the
plantations have to be regularly cleaned of undergrowth and weeds. The fruits are about the size of a cherry and are collected before they drop; then, they are peeled at home. After being washed and soaked for a few days, the fruits are roasted on large Amazonian hotplates. Then, after adding a small amount of water, the fruits are pounded to a thick paste and rolled by hand to form a kind of bar. These bars, about 20 cm. in length, are then smoke-dried over special woods. The end product is as hard as stone and resembles a salami in size and colour. For non-indigenous consumption the dried fruits are mechanically processed to a fine powder (Da Silva Lorenz 1992). With the exception of the washing of the smoked bars, all steps of the production are done by men, while the preparation of the beverage, in sateré called sap’o, is women’s work. To make the drink, the women rub the guaraná bar against a wet stone and continuously dissolve the rubbings in a calabash filled with water. The result is a whitish, nutty and bitter tasting beverage. On more formal occasions, sap’o is offered in a calabash by a man. Each person in turn takes a drink, expresses his or her satisfaction by saying ‘waku’, ‘good’, and returns the calabash. During these drinking ceremonies, the prevailing mood is solemn and concentrated, as an expression of inner composure and contemplation of common values.

Illustration 11.1  Guarana plants (Paullinia cupana)
The dramatic climax of these narrations was the killing of a primordial being, whose dismembered body parts transformed themselves into cultivated plants. Central to this religious belief, held by Jensen to be a creation of the first horticulturalists, is the cultivated plant. In accordance with its importance for humans it is taken to be divine, but nevertheless or because of this, the divine being has to be killed, for growth would only be conceivable in close association with death. For Jensen, the ‘Killed Deity’ (idem 1965) embodies one and the same idea: killing is a prerequisite for growth and the primordial killing, which brought food and life to humans, has to be perennially repeated in ritual (Streck 1997).

In his recent reflections on Jensen, German anthropologist Bernhard Streck (1997) considers the common feature of these ‘archaic’ cultures to be their contrast to modern industrial society, as well as their ‘non-participation in world religions founded on written doctrines and secular salvationist promises’(146). Their alternative conceptions of the world would have produced allies in the western environmental movement: tribal societies as ‘guardians of the world’ (Burger 1991) and ‘guarantors of biodiversity’ (see Forest Trend 2004). Streck shuffles the terms in an inspiring way: While modernity uses the word ‘development’ to refer to one-sided growth, which ‘would make life without death, or increase without decrease, conceivable and desirable’ (1997: 158), from the perspective of anthropology these contrasting societies conceive of ‘growth in its ancestral, natural quality, as the coming and going of life, as life that is continually renewed but never really augmented’ (l.c.). Instead of being referred to as ‘developing countries’, these societies should be called ‘growth societies’ in a deeper sense, rather than our industrial societies which long for economic growth (l.c.). This ‘archaic’ cosmovision would keep in check ‘nature destroying economic power’.

Illustration 11.2  Uniawasap’i plants the eye of her child, giving rise to guaraná

The ‘archaic’ ideology with its basic social mode of reciprocity (between humans and nature) would in the end form the cultural dispositive for ecological sustainability.

Consumer Societies

Although the central mythological topos of the ‘Killed Deity’ is very common among Amazonian societies (see Zerries 1969), one is hard pressed to find its ‘ritual recapture’ (in the sense mentioned above: that killing is a prerequisite for growth and the primordial killing, which brought food and life to humans, has to be perennially repeated in ritual) as Jensen had it. As I have said, in Sateré-Mawé mythology there is continuous mention of dismembered, butchered or otherwise crushed up primordial beings, from whose testicles, breasts or intestines a variety of plants originate: from manioc to cotton, from palm fruits to guaraná. Judging from the mythological importance of these culinary-mythological concepts, one has almost the impression of some kind of vegetarian cannibalism. Nowadays this may only be cultural background noise, but nevertheless it seems worthwhile to consider Amazonian societies not so much as growth societies in Streck’s deeper sense, but rather as consumer societies, as societies which attribute to the food they ingest special, ontologically transforming qualities (Hugh-Jones 1995, Vilaça 1992, Fausto 2002, Conklin 2001).

Fausto describes the process of (re-) production of Amazonian societies as a process of the production of kinship embedded in the dialectic of predation, the conflictive relation with the affinal Other, and familiarisation, the transformation of the Other into a consanguineal confidant. The decisive differential in this struggle over the direction of (mutual) predation is the mode of consumption: either eat somebody (predation) or eat with, or like somebody (commensality) (Fausto 2002). However, this dialectic must be differentiated from yet another consumptive category: a kind of non-eating or anti-meal (Hugh-Jones 1995). This consumptive mode triggers a process of transcending society and kinship by dissolving affinal, predatory relations as well as convivial consanguinity (Overing, and Passes 2000) and opens out to the universalism of communitas.

Now, what follows promptly leads us in a direction opposite to that of the ideology of archaic growth societies: instead of the impassive acceptance of death and decay as a prerequisite to life, we have anxious or even desperate attempts to negate and circumvent death and the human condition altogether (Biersack 1996). Within this context the quality of food adopts an almost eschatological importance.

In the ritual praxis of Tupi Guarani societies in particular, the so-called prophetic movements are a well known phenomenon, in which whole populations migrated on a quest for a Land Without Evil (H. Clastres 1978). Much has been written on the religious fervour and enthusiasm of these movements and their tragic failures. However, one aspect has usually been neglected: besides singing and dancing, it
is the ingestion of light food that enables one to overcome earthly heaviness and enter the Land Without Evil (without having to die first!). Nimuendajú's classic text (1914) on the prophetic movements of the Apacocuvá-Guarani reports that the cataclysmic catastrophe these movements tried to escape, is caused by the collapse of the earth's disc under the weight of the many corpses it has already had to consume:

'I have already have eaten too many corpses, I am sick and tired, make an end, my father!' (loc.cit.: 335)

As has been said, ritual means to escape the cataclysm consist in abstaining from certain types of food or in limiting oneself to certain types:

Through this way of living, their (the medicine chiefs of the Apapocuvá) bodies became light, ... the animal soul was suppressed and the ayucú (name soul) went back to where it came from. In their medicine dance the soul left the earth and went to Nandecy, Nanderyquey or Tupá. Sometimes their dead bodies were found, sometimes they ascended alive. Mostly they departed alone, but sometimes they took along their followers, in some cases the whole dance house along with everybody in it ascended to heaven. (loc.cit.: 328).

In some cases the practice of ritual cannibalism converged with this quest for overcoming death. In an early source on the Chiriguano (Guarani of Bolivia) it is said: '... dicen que por ser ligero' – 'they say it is to become light'; that is, if they consumed human flesh, which is considered to be 'good food', it would make their body 'light', capable of ascending to heaven (Combès 1987). The desired effect of this ritual dietetic food is always ascension to heaven, return to a paradise lost, and it is the entanglement in the processes of earthly growth, in the cycles of birth and death, that corrupt the body and make it heavy. The fundamentalist prophets of the Guarani orated against the human condition, which – through the weight of its 'bad existence' (teko acht kwe) – would prevent ascension to the Land Without Evil. Making the body light, its Dis-encarnation would lead to the condition of perfection (aguye), necessary for the entrance into the Land Without Evil without having to die (kandire) (H. Clastres 1978, Combès 1992).

In the cosmology of the culturally related Sateré-Mawé (Da Silva Lorenz n.d., Texeira 2005), of whom no prophetic movement has been reported, the idea of a lost, ideal world without death can nevertheless be found, albeit a world that has been dislocated to the heavens above since primordial times. This immortal world is in sharp contrast to the earth which is associated with death, corporeality and mortality, originating from the bodies of two sisters. Attempts to ascend to the perfect world always fail, which, as I have been told, explains why this earth contains so many dead.

Economic Crisis

The Sateré-Mawé had plenty of reasons to yearn for a Land Without Evil when, in the 1960s and 1970s, they were threatened with extinction as a social and cultural community. In a fundamental economic crisis, their capacity to ensure their own subsistence had collapsed. The Sateré-Mawé had increasingly become victims of the regional economic system, which in the typical manner of Amazonian boom-cycles recklessly exploited rose-wood (pau rosa, Aniba roseadora). The Sateré-Mawé had sunk ever deeper into debt bondage due to the avimento-system; held in slavery-like dependency by their patrons, they were forced to neglect their own plantations, overcome by hunger and – as it is said – they decided to stop having children in this world. It is largely due to the efforts of the Catholic mission that Sateré-Mawé society did not disappear. What I would like to stress here is that many of the societies focused on by the west as 'guardians of the earth' have to fulfil their role not on the basis of intact but rather largely destroyed structures.

A certain consolidation notwithstanding, Sateré-Mawé society continued to be deeply involved in the regional market economy: anyone who does not want to suffer hunger needs cash to be able to buy food. Until recently there were two possible ways of access to financial resources: firstly by tapping into the local system of assistencialismo: that is, passively awaiting aid from the national authorities or international organisations, without ever really understanding why they distribute free gifts in this way; secondly by commercializing manioc flour, which despite the high work input (especially by women) yields only a low price on the regional market. In addition, there is the ecologically critical solution of extending the cultivated areas.

The resulting 'monocultures' are just one example of violating the ethic of balanced mediation between humans and nature and the social ideal of reciprocity, which in our world has become proverbial for the cultures of Amazonia.

In view of the urgent necessity of social and economic reconstruction of Sateré-Mawé society, with approximately seventy villages along the Andirá and Marau rivers, the Tribal Council (Conselho Geral da Tribo Sateré-Mawé, CGTSM) decided on the ambitious guaraná project. This project intended not only to satisfy the economic demands of the people, but also to preserve the only existing gene-pool of this industrially important plant through sustainable management of the anthropic space of traditional guaraná cultivation. The project consists of selling locally produced guaraná as an organic, native product of unique quality at a differential price. In the long term, the funds obtained through a rigorous pricing policy would be used exclusively for the general benefit of the Sateré-Mawé. To put it simply, one third of the price goes to the producers, one third to the Tribal Council (for recurring expenses as well as for matters of common interest to the community), and finally one third for commercialisation, consulting, promotion, environmental monitoring, quality control and research. This scheme of dividing up the earnings, which – in spite of all the immediate necessities of the producers –
does not lose sight of long-term development, requires a high degree of persuasive work on the part of the activists in the Tribal Council.

The basic idea of the project is that the guaraná of the Sateré-Mawé should be seen on the international market as more than a product of high quality; it should be seen as an ethical product, associated not only with ecological and social costs, but also with social and cultural values, qualities that should justify a high consumer price. Thus, the French importer Guayapi Tropical changed from a supplier who offered guaraná for 10 US$ per kilo to the Sateré-Mawé, who sell for over 40 US$ per kilo. In the context of its strategy of 'fair trade', the Italian Cooperativa Terzo Mondo declared itself willing to advance 100 per cent of the price of the anticipated amount of production before delivery, in order to ensure the functioning of the project without having to borrow outside capital. According to the Italian project partner, Mauricio Fraboni, the social or cultural sustainability of the project is due not only to the deep cultural identification of the Sateré-Mawé with guaraná, but also to the attitude of the Tribal Council, which believes that legal and political recognition can only be constructed on the basis of economic autonomy. This economic autonomy in turn provides the Council with the necessary credibility (Fraboni 2001).

As has been said, the 'Projeto Guarani' is exclusively self-financing. This self-financing can be ensured only by the altruistic 'fair trade' ethic, in which the final consumer in Europe is prepared to pay a little extra for existential values such as ecological safety and the preservation of biodiversity. However, we must remember that this is the European morality of the project, based on principles agreed upon in the Kyoto Protocol or Climate Alliance by western groups and organisations with a critical stance against industrial growth and consumption. This morality cannot necessarily be derived from indigenous ideological premises.

In order to better understand the indigenous perspective it is advisable to take up the thread again that led us on the quest for the Land Without Evil.

As we have already suggested, the consumer behaviour of Amazonian Indians, at least the Tupi-Guarani or Tupian groups, have moral connotations which are related to a series of dilemmas intrinsic to indigenous Amazonian cosmologies:

The reports on consumption and prophecy among the Tupi-Guarani exhibit a kind of puritanism, seeking salvation in the sense of overcoming, or freeing oneself from periodic processes of vitality, growth and reproduction. Entanglement in these processes is considered as corrupting, sickening and burdensome in the true sense of the word. It is obvious that these ideas are contrary to a cosmo-vision that celebrates life, growth and reproduction complementing death and violence, as among the horticulturalists discussed by Jensen.

To this ontological dilemma is added a sociological one: an attempt is made to overcome the social configurations of reproductive, periodical life within matrimonial relations and their potential for rivalry and violence among affines. In a Satere-Mawe myth, the origin of clan organisation is explained by the appearance of a jaguar-monster threatening to extinguish primordial mankind. An old woman manages to kill the beast and then bestows plant and animal names on the survivors, according to the places where they hid from the monster. This was the origin of the exogamous clans (yinwina); from that moment on, people could freely marry each other, the fertility of primordial times was overcome, but so too was its peacefulness: according to the myth, the clans immediately became entangled in bloody wars.

The cosmological dilemma of an inter-marrying but quarrelsome society after the fall finds expression in Sateré-Mawé discourse in the form of a kind of archaism, that is, the effort to return to an harmonious 'Urgesellschaft' (primordial society) before the fall. The context for this archaism is the ongoing conversion movement to evangelical or pentecostal denominations among the Sateré-Mawé.

The final dilemma is a political one - namely, the effort to create enough authority and persuasive power within a politically egalitarian society to transcend social differences and particularist interests, touches directly on the cultural sustainability of projects such as the projeto guaraná in an indigenous society of Amazonia. In these societies, the lack of institutional means to reach consensus signifies that it can only be reached discursively: for the Tupi, veritable masters of speech, consensus is obtained through the use of the 'good words', in Sateré-Mawé: sehay wakua.

In Sateré-Mawé cosmogony, it was good words that let the ideal world ascend to heaven, and good words were also spoken in the guaraná myth, words that are immediately connected with chiefly authority. After Uniawasap'i had planted the eyes of her son, she spoke the following words:

"Now you are dead, but one day you will be in this world to organise all work. You will be a leader (sat. morewakat!).
All your descendants will gather together in your name forever!
You will show yourself responsible for your descendants when their time for work comes,
for constructing houses, setting up plantations, clearing the land, for every kind of work, and when the authorities gather together!"

In this context, 'work' means not so much the drudgery of the peasant's daily routine, but rather the construction of a specific kind of sociality, a disposition to communal work, that can only be induced by the 'good words'. In former times, the context for uttering the 'sehay wakua' was the purati-g ritual, an indispensable part of which was the ritual consumption of a very thick sap'o or guaraná beverage.

The so-called purati-g first of all is a tangible object, a ceremonial club with an incised decoration of a type well known in the Guayana area. But the interesting point is that this object is by no means regarded by the Sateré-Mawé as a weapon. In Portuguese the Satere-Mawe use the expression 'patente', meaning 'patent', 'document' or 'certification'. Why is this so? The myth of the origin of the purati-g, as it is told today by the evangelical elite, can be summarized as follows (Kapfhammer 2004): A fight took place between the culture hero Wastiri
The tribal Council and the general chief (also called Ahumare) is the final authority in the traditional society, but it is also a system of checks and balances that prevents any one person from gaining too much power. The chief is elected by the people and is responsible for making decisions that affect the community. The Council is made up of members who represent different areas and interests within the community. They meet regularly to discuss issues and make decisions.

The Council is responsible for making decisions that affect the community, such as setting taxes, making laws, and resolving disputes. They also have the power to remove the chief if they feel that he is not doing a good job.

The people of the community are aware of their rights and responsibilities, and they take an active role in decision-making processes.

Conclusion

The tribal council and the general chief (also called Ahumare) are the most powerful authority in the traditional society, and they have a great deal of influence over the lives of the people. They are responsible for making decisions that affect the community, and they are also responsible for enforcing those decisions. The people of the community are aware of their rights and responsibilities, and they take an active role in decision-making processes. The tribal council and the general chief (also called Ahumare) are a vital part of the traditional society, and they play a crucial role in maintaining the stability and harmony of the community.
of intimacy', or peaceful attempt to establish conviviality marked by consanguinity (Overing 1999; Kaphammer 2004, Wright and Kaphammer 2004; Wright 2004). Nevertheless, I would like to propose a somewhat different emphasis here, one that has more to do with the ‘range’ of the social fields created by these different ‘economies’. The ‘culture of mediation’ (Vermittelerkultur) of shamanism and clan organisation with its ‘short range morality’ (Santos Granero 1986) has a structural tendency towards symbolic as well as real delimitation against the ‘Other’. It therefore has a particularising effect, without doubt historically contingent on regional socio-political forms such as the tutelary regime, economic and political clientelism, amongst others. On the other hand, a ‘movement of immediacy’ seems to originate from the mythopraxis of the purati-g-complex, that claims social, economic and political power in a universalistic way.

The former strategy of legitimating authority in Amazonia at least implicitly bases its life-giving power on an exchange of life for death and by doing so can at least tentatively be associated with the world view of tropical horticulturalists and its basic notion of violence and death as a prerequisite for new life, as Adolf E. Jensen had it. The second strategy of power legitimation is implicitly based on the contrasting idea that life-giving power lies within the ritually enforced negation and overcoming of death. To a certain degree, we are reminded here of Pierre Clastres’ idea (1976), according to which the prophetic movements of the Tupi-Guaraní served to dissolve particularising structures and differentiations. I would again point out that the ‘right words’ (beautiful and morally correct) as well as the ‘right consumer behaviour’ (in the sense of consuming only ‘foods’ that would propitiate the transition to the desired world without evil) were the decisive ritual measures within these prophetic movements.

While from a historical point of view these ‘universalistic’ tendencies in Amazonian societies may be exacerbated in times of crisis, structurally it seems that both tendencies are embedded in the rhythm of annual and economic cycles. A final example of the interlocking of manioc and guaraná production schemes among the Sateré-Mawé illustrates this:

**Guaraná – Manioc – Cycle**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allocation of work season</th>
<th>Allocation of work gender</th>
<th>Social formation</th>
<th>Work formation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>manioc</td>
<td>dry season</td>
<td>dispersion: life in the gardens</td>
<td>collective work <em>puxirum</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guaraná</td>
<td>rainy season</td>
<td>concentration: life in the village</td>
<td>individual work</td>
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References


———: Weltbild einer frühen Kultur, Wiesbaden 1948 [= Die getötete Gottheit, 1965]


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**Afterword**

Joel Robbins

I am very grateful for the opportunity to write an afterword for this important collection focused on conversion and Christianity among the indigenous people’s of the Americas. I am grateful first because of the quality of the work collected here, and second because I am confident the book will have an impact on how Christianity is studied in the future in relation to Amerindian societies and beyond. And I am also grateful for a third reason, one that is a little more complicated to express and that turns on what an unlikely candidate I am for being given this opportunity. Let me begin by explaining what I mean.

In his chapter in this volume, Gow points out the similarities between the regional systems of the Bajo Huallaga and the Alto Xingú, which he sees as both articulated through a ‘combination of local heterogeneity and global homogeneity’ (Gow, p. 48). It makes a certain sense to describe anthropology as similarly structured, at least in the more successful of its intellectual endeavors. Such successful endeavors tend to be ones in which anthropologists bring together strong, often divergent traditions of regional ethnography in theoretical conversations that, even if they are not always based on a homogeneity of theoretical outlook, at least share enough conceptual common ground to allow for fruitful comparative discussion. The intellectual issues on which the discipline is able to operate successfully on both of these levels changes through time: while once kinship might have been a prototypical domain for this kind of treatment, or myth, more recently it is others such as, for example, gender or local appropriations of the global that have held pride of place. Yet even as the anthropological spotlight that brings significant ethnographic accomplishment and theoretical ferment into a single focus shifts its aim through time, there are some corners of the world of human practice upon which it never falls. Christianity has until recently been one of these corners: there was some (though not much) good ethnography of Christian peoples, but there was no wider theoretical, comparative dialogue to speak of. African Christians were Africans first and foremost, Melanesian Christians were Melanesians, Amazonian Christians were Amazonians, and so on. One might compare Christians with others in their regions, and particularly with others who had not converted so that one could determine the extent to which an indigenous ‘substrate’ existed beneath the Christian overlay. But one would rarely examine Christians from one part of the world in connection with Christians from other places. There was no global framework of intellectual ‘homogeneity’ that would allow such a comparative examination to develop.