

# “thus are our bodies, thus was our custom”: mortuary cannibalism in an Amazonian society

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The Wari<sup>1</sup> (Pakaa Nova) are an indigenous population of about 1,500 people who live in the western Brazilian rain forest, in the state of Rondônia near the Bolivian border. Until the 1960s, they disposed of nearly all their dead by consuming substantial amounts of corpses' body substances. All Wari' elders living today took part in or witnessed mortuary cannibalism, and their recollections offer an opportunity to view cannibalism from the perspectives of those who participated in it. This article explores the question of why cannibalism was the preferred means for disposing of the dead, emphasizing indigenous interpretations of the logic and meanings of cannibalism.

From a cross-cultural perspective, Wari' customs appear unusual in several respects. In most other societies, mortuary cannibalism involved the consumption of only small amounts of a corpse's body substances, which typically were ingested by a dead person's consanguineal kin.<sup>2</sup> Among the Wari', however, the dead person's affines ideally consumed all of the roasted flesh, brains, heart, liver, and—sometimes—the ground bones. Cannibalism was the preferred treatment for all Wari' corpses, except in a few circumstances in which bodies were cremated.

The Wari' practiced both exocannibalism (the eating of enemies and social outsiders) and endocannibalism (the eating of members of one's own group) but considered the two forms of anthropophagy to have little in common. The eating of enemies, which will not be examined in detail here,<sup>3</sup> involved overt expressions of hostility: enemy body parts were abused and treated disrespectfully, and the freshly roasted flesh was eaten off the bone *ak karawa*, “like animal meat” (see Vilaça 1992:47–130). In contrast, the very different customs of mortuary cannibalism expressed honor and respect for the dead.

This article focuses on how mortuary cannibalism fit into Wari' experiences of grief and mourning. My approach traces themes emphasized by contemporary Wari' in reflecting on their past participation in cannibalistic funerals. The question “Why did you eat the dead?” tended to draw a limited range of responses. The most common reply was “*Je' kwerexi*,” “Thus was

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*This article examines the cultural logic of mortuary cannibalism practiced, until the 1960s, by the Wari' (Pakaa Nova) of western Brazil. Wari' practices are inadequately explained by the materialist, psychogenic, and symbolic interpretations prominent in recent cannibalism theories. This analysis emphasizes indigenous understandings of the relation of cannibalism to experiences of mourning. Concepts of the human body's social significance made its destruction important to the working out of grief and the attenuation of memories of the dead. In a social process of mourning concerned with transforming mourners' images of the dead, cannibalism appeared as a key element that affirmed ideas of human-animal regeneration and reciprocity expressed in Wari' myth, cosmology, and eschatology. [cannibalism, body concepts, ritual, death and mourning, Amazonian Indians]*

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our custom."<sup>4</sup> This statement should be taken seriously; for many Wari', cannibalism was simply the norm; for reasons I discuss in this article, it was considered to be the most respectful way to treat a human body. Beyond this, when older people reflected on deeper, personal motives, they tended to link cannibalism to a process of achieving emotional detachment from memories of the dead: "When we ate the body, we did not think longingly [*koromika*] about the dead much." Numerous middle-aged and elderly people—of both sexes and in various villages—independently offered the explanation that cannibalism altered memories and the emotions of grief in ways that helped them deal with the loss of a loved one. Elders were bemused and at times rather irritated by anthropologists' singular obsession with the eating of bodies, for they insisted that cannibalism cannot be understood apart from the entire complex of mortuary rites and mourning behaviors aimed at reshaping emotional and spiritual relations between the living and the dead.

To understand cannibalism's role in mourning, I propose to show that Wari' practices reflected two concepts of widespread salience in lowland South America: the idea of the human body as a locus of physically constituted social relationships and social identity, and ideas about human-nonhuman reciprocity. These concepts merged in a yearlong series of traditional mourning rites that focused on actual and symbolic transformations of a dead person's body, from human to animal form. Cannibalism was a powerful element in a social process of mourning structured around images of ancestors' regeneration as animals with ongoing, life-supporting relations to their living relatives.

Wari' testimonies concerning the affective dimensions of cannibalism are unusual in the ethnographic literature, for we have few detailed accounts of cannibalism from the viewpoint of its practitioners. Most peoples who formerly practiced it no longer do so, leaving few individuals able or willing to speak to personal experiences of people-eating. Perhaps because of this, anthropological analyses of cannibalism have tended to focus mostly on the level of societal systems of meaning and symbolism. Cannibalism as praxis is poorly understood. This is particularly striking in the case of mortuary cannibalism: although it is, by definition, a cultural response to a fellow group member's death, we know little about how the socially constituted symbols of mortuary cannibalism relate to emotions and fit into individuals' lived experiences of coming to terms with a relative's death. Wari' recollections offer insights into one people's experiences.

In the anthropology of anthropophagy, mortuary cannibalism has received rather short shrift. The ethnographic and ethnohistorical literatures are dominated by accounts of the exocannibalism of enemies, which has been reported more frequently, and described in more depth, than endo- or mortuary cannibalism. Concomitant with this predominant focus on enemy-eating, universalist theories of cannibalism have tended to interpret anthropophagy as a fundamentally antisocial act. Psychogenic theorists from Freud (1981[1913]) to Sagan (1974) have viewed all forms of people-eating as an expression of individuals' egocentric, oral-aggressive impulses. Recent social anthropological theories also have emphasized themes of antisociality. Lewis (1986:63–77) subsumed endo- and exocannibalism alike under a model in which consumption and ingestion reflect oral and genital aggression, and agonistic desires for dominance. Arens (1979) interpreted cannibalism as a universal symbol of barbarism, otherness, and inhumanity.

Mortuary cannibalism data have a special place in cannibalism studies, for the meanings associated with consuming one's fellows tend to be quite different from the motives for eating enemies. Mortuary cannibalism systems present the greatest potential challenge to interpretations of cannibalism as an antisocial act of aggression and domination, and the few ethnographic studies of mortuary cannibalism have tended to highlight its socially integrative dimensions. Analyses of several Melanesian systems have examined the role of mortuary cannibalism as part of the assemblage of cultural symbols and rituals whereby social groups defined and

reconstituted themselves after a death (Gillison 1983; Lindenbaum 1979; Meigs 1984; Poole 1983). Sanday's (1986) cross-cultural analysis emphasized the semantic complexity of anthropophagy and showed that cannibalism may symbolize not only evil and chaos but also social order and the regeneration of life-giving cosmic forces.

Recent general theories of mortuary cannibalism have considered only a limited set of cultural motivations, however, and have focused exclusively on ethnographic data from a single region, Melanesia. The diverse Melanesian endocannibalism systems expressed a variety of cultural meanings, but they tended to share in two main ideas: the assumption that cannibalism primarily benefits those who consume human substance; and the notion of an economy of biosocial substance in which cannibalism serves as a means of acquiring body substances, vital energies, or personal attributes contained in the dead person's corpse and of transferring them to those who eat it. These concepts have been widely assumed to characterize all endocannibalism systems. In the two most recent anthropological syntheses of cannibalism theory, Sanday stated that "[e]ndocannibalism recycles and regenerates social forces that are believed to be physically constituted in bodily substances or bones" (1986:7) and Lewis asserted that "the ritual consumption of parts of the human body enables the consumer to acquire something of the body's vital energy" (1986:73). Neither interpretation applies to the Wari' case.

Although both endo- and exocannibalism were widely practiced in lowland South America well into the 20th century (Dole 1974; Métraux 1947:22–25), the Amazonian literature has received little attention in recent North American and British discourse on cannibalism, although it has been of longstanding interest among Brazilian and French anthropologists. Some Amazonian endocannibalism reflected concepts similar to the Melanesian theme of recycling dead people's energies or attributes (see, for example, Acosta Saignes 1961:161–162; Dole 1974:307; Erikson 1986:198; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971:138–139), but many South American systems expressed quite different ideas, often involving notions of altering relations between body and spirit or between the living and the dead. Wari' informants universally denied that their consumption of either kin or enemies had anything to do with recycling substance, attributes, or energies from the dead to those who ate them.<sup>5</sup> They consistently represented cannibalism not as a boon for the eaters of human flesh but as a service for those who did not eat: the deceased and their close kin.

Wari' mortuary customs reflect complex social and symbolic systems about which a great deal more can be said than is possible in this article. I refer interested readers to the works of other anthropologists who have studied Wari' society (Mason 1977; Von Graeve 1972, 1989) and the puzzle of Wari' anthropophagy (Meireles 1986; Vilaça 1989, 1992). Meireles has examined the role of cannibalism in defining self-other relations in the construction of Wari' personhood and emphasized the symbolism of fire as mediator of human-nonhuman relations. Vilaça presented symbolic-structuralist interpretations of both exo- and endocannibalism, with special attention to affinal relations, festivals, and origin myths related to anthropophagy. Her analysis has focused on Wari' conceptions of the social universe as structured around oppositions and reciprocal exchanges between predators and prey. Symbolic oppositions between the categories of *wari'* ("we, people") and *karawa* ("animals") recur in Wari' ideology and rituals at multiple levels: humans vs. animals, Wari' vs. non-Wari', consanguines vs. affines, the living vs. the dead. Vilaça (1992:291) has emphasized that mortuary cannibalism symbolically associated the dead person with the category of prey and identified the living Wari' with the category of predators.

My analysis complements Vilaça's and Meireles's interpretations by situating cannibalism in relation to three other dimensions of Wari' experience: social processes of mourning, body concepts, and the regenerative imagery of ancestors' transformations into animals. To examine relationships among the social, symbolic, and ritual systems, I first describe the ethnographic context and mortuary rites and discuss why the Wari' case does not fit the major materialist and

psychogenic models proposed to explain cannibalism elsewhere. I then examine social and psychological dimensions of Wari' body concepts to show why the corpse's destruction by cannibalism or cremation was considered essential. Finally, I explore Wari' ideas about human-animal relations that suggest an answer to the question of why the Wari' preferred cannibalism rather than cremation.

## ethnographic context

The Wari' speak a language in the Chapakuran language family isolate. They entered permanent relations with Brazilian national society between 1956 and 1969, when the former national Indian agency, the S.P.I. (Serviço de Proteção aos Índios), sponsored a series of pacification expeditions that terminated Wari' autonomy. The Wari' now reside in eight major villages in indigenous reserves along tributaries of the Mamoré and Madeira Rivers in the municipality of Guajará-Mirim, Rondônia. Prior to the contact they had no canoes and inhabited interfluvial (*terra firme*) areas of the rain forest, away from the larger rivers. Today, as in the past, subsistence depends on slash-and-burn farming, hunting, fishing, and foraging. Maize is the principal staple crop, and hunting is the most socially valued food-getting activity.

Precontact villages typically were comprised of about thirty people living in several nuclear family households. Contemporary Wari' communities are administered by FUNAI (Fundação Nacional do Índio), the Brazilian government Indian agency, whose policies of population concentration and sedentarization have disrupted traditional settlement patterns and social organization. Today's villages, of 80–400 people, are located at nontraditional sites near major rivers or roads accessible to transportation to town.

Wari' society is staunchly egalitarian, and social relations are characterized by a high degree of flexibility. Leadership is ephemeral; there are no "chiefs," and no formal positions of political authority above the household level. Mason (1977) categorized Wari' kinship terminology as a Crow/Omaha-type system. Wari' kin groups are ego-centered bilateral kindreds; there are no lineages, and no internal segregation based on age grades or ceremonial activities. Precontact postmarital residence was flexible, with couples free to live near either spouse's bilateral kin after initial matrilocal bride service. Of central importance for understanding mortuary customs is the role of affinity as the strongest organizing principle in Wari' society. Alliances among families related by marriage<sup>6</sup> are important in food sharing, mutual aid, funeral duties and, in the past, were one basis for war alliances. Wari' society is by no means conflict-free, but most decision making is consensual, and the general tenor of social relations emphasizes mutuality and reciprocity among kin, affines, and allies.

The precontact Wari' were divided into named, territorially based subgroups (Oro Nao', Oro Eo', Oro At, Oro Mon, Oro Waram, and Oro Waram-Xijein) that were the largest social units with which individuals identified. A subgroup's members were committed to peaceful coexistence and cooperation in warfare and emergencies. Amicable relations among the villages in a subgroup were affirmed and maintained by festival exchanges, including celebrations called *hürooin* and *tamara* that are models for the human-nonhuman alliance exchanges represented in mortuary cannibalism.

After the first peaceful contacts with outsiders were established in the Rio Dois Irmãos area in 1956, government (S.P.I.) agents and New Tribes missionaries witnessed several anthropophagous funerals. Most of the Wari' population entered contact in 1961–62. News of Wari' funerary cannibalism became public knowledge in early 1962, when an S.P.I. agent sold his eyewitness account to a São Paulo newspaper (*Folha de São Paulo* 1962). In response, a competing paper sent journalists to the Rio Negro-Ocaia contact site, where they photographed dismemberment and roasting at a child's funeral (de Carvalho 1962). Brazilian anthropologists and S.P.I. officials convinced the paper not to publish these photographs and attempted to use

the ensuing publicity to call public attention to the tragic situation of the recently contacted Wari' (Cruzeiro 1962:123–125).

Contact with the pacification teams introduced devastating epidemics of measles, influenza, tuberculosis, and other cosmopolitan diseases. Within two or three years of contact, approximately 60 percent of the precontact population was dead. Chronically ill, psychologically traumatized, and unable to hunt or plant crops, the survivors became extremely dependent on outsiders for food and medical care. Missionaries and government agents manipulated this dependency to put an end to cannibalism by threatening to withhold food and medicines from those who continued to eat the dead. They insisted that corpses be buried instead. At each of the three major contact sites, Wari' initially resisted this forced change to burial.

The deadly epidemics, however, created another reason to abandon cannibalism: traditional illness concepts could not explain the unfamiliar maladies, and so people listened when missionaries told them that the new diseases were spread by eating infected corpses. Wari' began burying people who died of illness (the great majority of early postcontact deaths), but, for a while, they continued to cannibalize those whose deaths were attributed to accidents, sorcery, and other nondisease causes. Families carried corpses into the forest, to be roasted away from outsiders' eyes. However, these efforts at deception ultimately failed, and by the end of 1962 or early 1963, nearly everyone had abandoned cannibalism altogether. (The exception was a group of about thirty Oro Mon who lived autonomously until 1969.) Today, all Wari' follow Western customs of burying corpses in cemeteries in the forest.<sup>7</sup>

No anthropologist has witnessed Wari' anthropophagy, and many data presented here are based on retrospective reconstructions. My primary sources are the testimonies of numerous older Wari' who say that they participated in or observed mortuary cannibalism. During two years of medical anthropological field work in 1985–87, I interviewed all 198 families in the communities of Santo André, Ribeirao, Lage, Tanajura, and Rio Negro-Ocaia (85 percent of the total Wari' population). Interviews with adults of both sexes, aimed at collecting genealogies and mortality and morbidity histories, often led to discussions of personal experiences with relatives' deaths and funerals. I observed aspects of contemporary mourning behavior, including ritual wailing and the handling of a corpse, but no one died in a village where I was present, and I attended no burials or complete funerals. Santo André, a community of 190 people, was my principal residence, and I discussed issues treated in this article with all the elders and many middle-aged people there. The most detailed information and insights came from several key informants: three men and two women between ages 60 and 75, two men in their 50s, and a man and woman in their early 40s. Most Santo André residents are descendants of the precontact Rio Dois Irmãos area population, and this article describes this group's practices, which differed only in minor details from other Wari' communities.

The Wari' do not conform to Arens' (1979) assertions that alleged cannibals seldom acknowledge eating anyone and that cannibalism is primarily a symbol of inhumanity and barbarism projected upon enemies, neighbors, and uncivilized "others." Wari' anthropophagy is not merely alleged by outsiders; Wari' themselves freely affirm practicing it in the past, even though they are aware that outsiders consider it barbaric. I found no one who denied that corpses customarily were cannibalized; numerous elders spoke openly of eating human flesh. Independent descriptions of particular funerals were internally consistent and corresponded to reports by New Tribes missionaries and S.P.I. agents who observed cannibalism in the early postcontact period. By any reasonable standards for the documentation of past events not witnessed by an ethnographer, there is no question that the Wari' ate their dead.

### **traditional funerals**

Today, as in the past, funerals generally take place in the house of a senior kinsman of the deceased.<sup>8</sup> The household's sleeping platform (or raised floor) is removed to permit mourners

to crowd together under the palm-thatch roof. Two loosely defined groups have prescribed roles at funerals. The first is the *iri' nari*<sup>9</sup> ("true kin," or close sanguines and the spouse). Wari' define consanguinity in terms of shared blood and classify spouses as consanguines by virtue of sexual transfers of body fluids that create shared blood. Between spouses, it is said, "there is only one body" (*xika pe' na kwere*). Linked to the deceased by shared body substance, the *iri' nari* are the principal mourners. From the time of biological death until the body is disposed of, they remain nearest the corpse, holding it in their arms and crying.

The second group of mourners, *nari paxi* ("those who are like kin but are not truly related"), most properly consists of the dead person's own affines and affines of the deceased's close kin, but the term is extended to include all non-consanguines attending the funeral. Close affines are responsible for the work of funerals: female affines prepare maize *chicha* (a sweet, unfermented drink) and maize *pamonha* (dense, unleavened bread) to feed visitors, and male affines (ideally, the dead person's brothers-in-law or sons-in-law) serve as messengers summoning people to the funeral. They prepare and dispose of the corpse and funeral apparatus and look out for the welfare of emotionally distraught mourners.

In traditional funerals, the *iri' nari* sat together, apart from other mourners. In contemporary funerals, the spatial division is less marked, but close kin remain nearest the corpse. All mourners press close together around the body, leaning on each other's shoulders and wailing. Death wails are of several types, including wordless crying, the singing of kinship terms for the deceased, and a more structured keening called *aka pijim* ("to cry to speak"), in which mourners recount memories of the deceased, singing of shared experiences and the person's life history, deeds, and kindnesses. (On Amazonian ritual lament, see Briggs 1992; Graham 1986; Seeger 1987; Urban 1988, 1991.) From the moment of death until the funeral's end, everyone joins in a ceaseless, high-pitched keening that sends a haunting mantra of collective grief reverberating off the surrounding forest.

The dead person's humanity and social connections are repeatedly affirmed in funeral actions directed at the corpse itself, which is the constant focus of attention. Corpses are never left to lie alone. From the moment of death until the body is disposed of, grieving kin constantly cradle the corpse in their arms, hugging it, pressing their own bodies against it. Desire for physical contact can be so intense that, according to several Santo André residents, there was a funeral a few years ago where the corpse was in danger of being pulled apart by distraught kin struggling to embrace it. Finally, a senior kinsman enforced order by mandating that only one person at a time could hold the body.

Numerous funeral actions express mourners' self-identification with the dead person's physical state and desires to join the deceased in death. Any loss of consciousness, such as fainting, is considered a form of death. In one common funeral practice, close relatives "die" (*mi' pin*) by lying one on top of the other, in stacks of three or four people with the corpse on top. When someone faints from the suffocating press of bodies, he or she is pulled out of the pile and someone else joins the pile, in a process repeated again and again. In a 1986 funeral, people piled into the homemade coffin, embracing the corpse on top.

In traditional funerals, the male affine helpers constructed the ritual firewood bundle and roasting rack. Ideally, these were made of roofbeams, decorated with feathers and painted with red annatto (*urucú*, *Bixa orellana*). A beam was taken from each house in the dead person's village, leaving the thatched roofs sagging in visible expression of death's violation of the community's integrity. Funerals for infants were less elaborate; regular, undecorated firewood was used. When preparations were completed, the helpers lit the fire, spread clean mats on the ground, and dismembered the body, using a new bamboo arrow tip. Internal organs were removed first, and the heart and liver were wrapped in leaves to be roasted. Body parts considered inedible, including the hair, nails, genitals, intestines, and other entrails, were burned. The helpers then severed the head, removed the brains, cut the limbs at the joints, and

placed the body parts on the roasting rack. Young children's body parts were wrapped in leaves in the manner used to roast small fish and soft foods.

Several elders recalled that the most emotionally difficult event in a funeral was the moment when the corpse was taken from its relatives' arms to be dismembered. As the body was cut, wailing and hysterical expressions of grief reached a fevered pitch. Up to this moment, funeral activities had been dominated by mourners' expressions of physical and affective attachments to the dead person's body. Dismemberment represented a radical alteration of the corpse and mourners' relations to it, a graphic severing of the attachments represented in the body. According to these elders, it was dismemberment, not cannibalism, that provoked the most intense emotional dissonance. Once the corpse had been cut, eating it was considered the most respectful possible treatment, for reasons discussed below.

The dead person's close consanguines (*iri' nari*) did not eat the corpse. Consumption of a close consanguine or spouse's flesh is strongly prohibited, because eating a close relative (with whom one shared body substance) would be tantamount to eating one's own flesh, or autocannibalism. It is believed to be fatal.<sup>10</sup>

The *nari paxi*, affines and other non-kin, were responsible for consuming the corpse; they are sometimes referred to as *ko kao'* ("those who ate"). In a married person's funeral, those who consumed the body typically included the dead person's spouse's siblings, spouse's parents, spouse's parents' siblings, and the deceased's children's spouses, as well as these individuals' own close consanguines. Unmarried people typically were eaten by their siblings' spouses, siblings' spouses' siblings, their parents' siblings' spouses, and these individuals' close kin. Thus, Wari' cannibalized members of the families from which their bilateral consanguines had taken marriage partners. Meireles (1986) noted that cannibalism restrictions generally coincided with incest prohibitions.

Cannibalism was a primary obligation of affinity. Adult men were obliged to eat their close affines; refusal to do so would have insulted the dead person's family. Women were not required to participate in cannibalism but did so at their own discretion.<sup>11</sup> Distinctions of generation, age, or gender were largely irrelevant: male and female adults and adolescents consumed corpses of all ages and both sexes. Men's and women's corpses were treated almost identically.

Roasting usually commenced in the late afternoon and eating usually began at dusk. The dead person's closest kin divided the well-roasted brains, heart, and liver into small pieces, placed the pieces on clean mats, and called the others to begin eating. The affines (*nari paxi*) did not descend greedily upon the flesh but hung back, crying and expressing reluctance to eat; only after repeated insistence by the dead person's close kin (*iri' nari*) did they accept the flesh. The *iri' nari* then prepared the other body parts by removing the flesh from the bones and dividing it into small pieces. They usually arranged these on a mat along with pieces of roasted maize bread (*pamonha*); in some funerals, they placed the flesh in a conical clay pot and handed pieces to the eaters, cradling the pot in their laps in the affectionate position used to hold someone's head in repose or during illness. In marked contrast to the aggressive, disrespectful treatment of enemies' flesh in exocannibalism, funeral eaters did not touch the flesh with their hands but held it delicately on thin splinters like cocktail toothpicks. They ate very slowly, alternately crying and eating. There appears to have been no special significance attached to ingesting particular body parts, and no pattern determining who ate which portions.

The ideal was to consume all of the flesh, heart, liver, and brains; in practice, the amount actually eaten depended on the degree of the corpse's decay. It is considered imperative that corpses not be disposed of (by cannibalism, cremation, or burial) until all important relatives have arrived at the funeral, seen the body, and participated in the wailing eulogies. The length of time before a body was roasted traditionally varied according to the dead person's age, status, and social ties: the older and more socially prominent the deceased, the longer the delay in

roasting. Before the contact, when villages were scattered over a wide territory, most adults were not roasted until two or three days after death, when decay was well-advanced.

It was considered important to consume as much flesh as possible. When, however, flesh was too putrid to stomach—as it usually was in the case of adult corpses—the eaters forced themselves to swallow small pieces from various body parts, then cremated the rest. The ideal of total consumption was realized mainly in funerals for infants and young children who, having few social ties of their own, were roasted within a day or so of their deaths and eaten entirely. Complete consumption also appears to have occurred for some terminally ill elders whose relatives gathered and commenced wailing long before biological death. In most adult and adolescent funerals, however, most of the flesh probably was burned rather than eaten.

Consumption of the corpse continued until dawn, at which time any remaining flesh was cremated. Treatment of bones varied. Sometimes they were ground into meal, mixed with honey, and consumed. In other cases, especially in the Rio Dois Irmãos area, the bones were burned, pulverized, and buried. In all cases, the clay pots, mats, roasting rack, and funeral fire remains were burned, pounded to dust, and buried *in situ* by the male affine helpers. The helpers then swept the earth to eradicate all traces of the funeral and replaced the household sleeping platform over the spot where the ashes were buried.

### **the question of human flesh as food**

Before examining what motivated Wari' mortuary cannibalism, it is useful to clarify what did not. The idea that institutionalized cannibalism may be motivated by needs for dietary protein was proposed by Harner (1977) to explain Aztec human sacrifice and has been elaborated by Harris (1977, 1985:199–234). Wari' practices involved the ingestion of significant quantities of flesh and ground bones, and the adults who consumed them would have gained some nutrients, notably protein and calcium. Two factors nevertheless militate against a materialist interpretation of the Wari' system.

First, there is no reason to assume that the precontact population suffered significant food shortages. Wari' controlled a large territory with low population density and abundant game, fish, and Brazil nut resources. Elders assert that hunger was infrequent, although then, as now, there were days without meat or fish. Missionaries present at the first contacts observed no signs of malnutrition, and the assumption that the precontact Wari' did not suffer protein shortages is consistent with biomedical studies of similar groups. Although protein-scarcity hypotheses were hotly debated in Amazonian cultural ecology from the late 1960s through the early 1980s, researchers have never documented protein deficiency in relatively undisturbed native Amazonian populations living in circumstances similar to the precontact Wari'. On the contrary, studies have found adequate or more than adequate protein intake (Berlin and Markell 1977; Chagnon and Hames 1979; Dufour 1983; Milton 1984). My own data on household diets in two communities, and anthropometric assessments from four communities, indicate that contemporary Wari' diets are generally adequate, even with the depletion of game and fish near today's larger, more sedentary villages.

A second argument against nutritional motivations for Wari' cannibalism is that much potentially edible flesh was burned rather than eaten, with no attempt to preserve it for later consumption. Even in cannibalizing enemies, Wari' did not maximize protein acquisition: warriors usually took only the head and limbs, discarding the fleshy trunk. Clearly, social considerations took precedence over biological functionalism in shaping Wari' practices.

### **the question of hostility**

Interpretations of cannibalism as an act of hostility are a staple of Western psychoanalytic theory (see Freud 1981 [1913]; Sagan 1974), and the fact that Wari' ate their affines raises the



question of whether cannibalism expressed or mediated affinal tensions. Like Freudians, Wari' recognize that eating can express hostility, as it did in the aggressive consumption of enemy flesh. My informants, however, universally rejected the notion that mortuary customs expressed any form of overt, covert, or displaced hostility. They insisted that hostility has no place at funerals; individuals on bad terms with the deceased are barred from attending, as reportedly happened a few years ago when a man was ordered away on the grounds that "you did not love him, it is not good that you come here." In addition, Wari' emphasized that funeral "table manners" sharply differentiated affinal cannibalism from acts of eating that did express aggression. As discussed below, eating has multiple cultural connotations and can express respect for that which is eaten.

Sagan (1974:28) has dismissed the possibility of cannibalism as an act of respect or compassion for the deceased, asserting that such ideas are a mere facade for covert ambivalence, hostility, and sadistic urges rooted in resentments against the dead for having abandoned the living.<sup>12</sup> It is difficult to assess, retrospectively, the question of whether Wari' mortuary cannibalism expressed aggression or hostility, but Wari' practices and discourse on cannibalism offer little support for this interpretation. Affinal tensions appear no greater among the precontact Wari' than in many noncannibalistic societies. Wari' express few expectations of inherent affinal conflict; ideally, and to a large extent in practice, they treat affinity as a matter of amity and mutually beneficial reciprocity. Today, as in the past, most marriages are arranged or approved by the families involved, who are careful to establish and perpetuate ties only to families with whom they enjoy positive relations. Affines call each other by consanguineal kin terms (Vilaça 1989:41–45), exchange meat and fish frequently, and offer aid in emergencies. When conflicts among affines arise, there are cultural mechanisms for dealing with them, including ritual fights (*mixita*) and discussions between family heads.

## affinity and exchange

Vilaça has emphasized the importance of mortuary cannibalism as a marker of Wari' affines' relations to one another: "The funeral rite . . . reveals, through the opposition between those who eat together [*comensais*] and those who do not [*não-comensais*], the opposition cognates/affines. In the interior of Wari' society, cannibalism constructs and identifies affinity" (1992:293).

Vilaça (1992:293) also observed that Wari' affinal cannibalism reflected a recurrent theme in South American mythology, identified by Lévi-Strauss in *The Raw and the Cooked* (1969): the characterization of affines (the "takers" of women) as real or potential cannibal prey. Besides the Wari', the Yanomami also practice affinal cannibalism, consuming their affines' ground bones (Albert 1985). Sixteenth-century Tupinambá exocannibalism involved another kind of affinal cannibalism: a war captive was married to a Tupinambá woman (making him an affine to her kin) before being killed and eaten (Staden 1928[1557]). In the cosmology of the Araweté of central Brazil (who bury their dead), cannibalism is seen as a transformative mechanism for creating affinal ties between humans and divinities: when Araweté die, the gods consume the human spirits (making them into beings like themselves), then rejuvenate and marry them (Viveiros de Castro 1992). Viveiros de Castro has observed that among the Araweté, Tupinambá, Yanomami, and Pakaa Nova (Wari'), cannibalism "links affines or transforms into affines those whom it links" (1992:259).<sup>13</sup>

Wari' affinal cannibalism might suggest a Lévi-Straussian model of exchanges of cooked meat (human flesh) for "raw" (virgin, fecund) women given in marriage (Lévi-Strauss 1969). As in many societies, eating is a Wari' metaphor for sexual intercourse, and there are obvious parallels between affinal exchanges of human flesh in funerals and the frequent exchanges of meat (which men give to female affines) and fish (which women give to male affines) that mark affinity in

everyday life. From a structuralist perspective, Wari' mortuary cannibalism resonates with exchanges of meat and marriage partners, but Wari' do not see it that way. Everyone with whom I raised this issue rejected an equation of cannibalism with exchanges of sexual partners or food; some found the suggestion insulting. Sexual and reproductive imagery has little place in Wari' mortuary practices, in marked contrast to its prominence in many other societies' mortuary rites (Bloch and Parry 1982), and in Melanesian endocannibalism practices linked to elaborate ideas about male and female body substances (see Gillison 1983; Poole 1983).

From an emic point of view, what was important in cannibalistic Wari' funerals was not the exchange of substance (human flesh) but the exchange of services. Disposal of the body is a primary obligation of affinity, a service performed out of respect for the dead person and his or her family. When asked why it was the affines who ate the corpse, Wari' elders invariably replied that the affines ate it because somebody had to eat it, and the dead person's consanguines (*iri' nari*) could not do so (because of the prohibition against eating the flesh of someone related to oneself by shared biological substance). In addition, a number of people asserted that one simply does not feel like eating anything when grieving intensely. Eating, particularly meat-eating, expresses happiness and social integration. Symbolic oppositions between sadness and oral activity (eating, drinking, singing, shouting) are numerous: adults eat little during close kin's illnesses, consume nothing at their funerals, and eat little while mourning. People considered it irrational to suggest eating flesh at a close relative's funeral.

By Wari' logic, these cultural assumptions definitively precluded cannibalism by consanguines. The task thus fell to affines, who were the only clearly defined social group that had close social ties to the dead person's family but did not share their intimate biological and affective ties to the deceased.<sup>14</sup> Affinal cannibalism was a matter of pragmatism.

It was also a matter of politics. Mortuary services are central in marking, strengthening, and reconstituting affinal ties after a death. Funerals draw extended families together as does no other event, and they are the most prominent occasion (aside from *mixita* fights) when affines act as discrete groups in complementary opposition to one another. In fulfilling mortuary obligations, including disposal of the corpse, Wari' families linked by marriage affirm continuing commitments that transcend the lifetime of any individual member.

If one accepts this indigenous view of the disposal of corpses (whether by burial, cannibalism, or cremation) as a service rendered to the family of the deceased, assigning this task to affines does not appear particularly unusual cross-culturally. In native Amazonian societies, affines perform burial and other funeral duties among the Cashinahua (Kensinger, in press), Canela (W. Crocker, in press), and Shavante (Maybury-Lewis 1974:281). Among the Mundurucú (Murphy 1960:72) and Kagwahiv (Kracke 1978:13), these tasks fall to members of the opposite moiety, the group from which the dead person's moiety takes marriage partners. Wari' mortuary cannibalism fit this pattern of delegating mortuary tasks to affines and reflected the associations between affinity and cannibalism found in other lowland South American societies' myths and cosmologies. But this does not explain why Wari' actually ate their affines, whereas other peoples with similar conceptual systems did not. In this article, the question to be addressed is not why the Wari' ate their affines, but why cannibalism was the preferred treatment for human corpses.

### **eating as an act of respect**

Pleasing the dead by consuming their bodies is a recurrent theme in Wari' discussions of mortuary cannibalism: the dead wanted to be eaten, or at least cremated, and not to have done either would have given offense. For dying individuals, the idea of being incorporated into fellow tribesmembers' bodies apparently had considerably more appeal than the alternative of being left to rot in the ground alone.<sup>15</sup> One man told of his great-aunt (FFZ) who, on her

deathbed, summoned him and his father (normally expected to cry rather than eat at her funeral) and asked them, as a favor, to join in consuming her body. In contrast to Western views of eating as an act of objectification and domination of the thing consumed, eating can express respect and sympathy in Wari' culture, especially in contrast to the alternative of burial. The ground is considered "dirty" and polluting. Adults who take pride in their bodies do not sit in the dirt, ritual objects must not touch the earth, and people avoid spilling food on the ground. These values influence attitudes towards burial in the earth, which informants often described as not only dirty, but also "wet" and "cold." Respectful treatment for human remains is dry and warm; the only traditional space for respectful burial was beneath household sleeping platforms, where small fires burned almost constantly, keeping the earth warm as well as dry. This is where funeral ashes were interred in the past and where placentae and miscarried fetuses continue to be buried. Before the contact, burial in the forest expressed dishonor and normally occurred in only one context: if a woman suffered multiple stillbirths or neonatal deaths, her family might request a male affine to bury her dead infant in an anthill or in wet earth beside a stream to discourage her future babies from dying and risking similarly unpleasant treatment.

In contrast to the disrespect manifest in burial, eating can be a sympathetic act, as shown in this story about the Maize Spirit (*Jaminain Mapak*) told by a Santo André man. The story explains why one should not leave maize lying on the ground:

Long ago, a man was walking to his field carrying a basket of maize seeds to plant. A maize kernel fell to the ground on the path. The man did not see it and went on. The maize seed began to cry like a child. Another man came along and found it crying on the ground. He picked it up and ate it. In doing so, he saved it, showing that he felt sympathy [*xiram pa*] for it. The man who ate the seed planted his field and it yielded great quantities of maize. The man who had left the seed on the ground planted his field, but nothing grew.

This parable demonstrates Wari' ideas that abandoning a spirit-being to lie on the forest floor connotes disrespect, whereas eating it expresses respect. Eating can be an act of compassion that pleases the thing consumed so that it bestows abundance on the eater.

Similar ideas about eating as an expression of respect for the eaten are evident in food taboos associated with *jami karawa*, animals whose spirits have human form (see Conklin 1989:336–350). Spirits never die, and when a hunter kills a *jami karawa* animal, its spirit assumes a new animal body. However, animal spirits cannot complete their transitions to new physical bodies as long as portions of their former bodies remain. To avoid provoking spirits' wrath, one must quickly roast and eat *jami karawa*. Animal spirits are offended by the killing and disrespectful treatment of their bodies, not by the eating of their flesh. On the contrary, eating demonstrates respect, especially in contrast to the alternative of abandoning uneaten body parts on or in the ground.

Several funeral customs expressed these values of honoring the dead by preventing their body substances from being lost to the earth. When corpses were cut, a close kinsman of the deceased sometimes lay face down, supporting the corpse on his back during the butchering, so that its fluids would spill onto his own body rather than onto the ground. Similarly, elders recalled that young children's corpses had much fat that dripped as they roasted; to prevent it from falling into the fire, a child's grieving parents and grandparents would catch the fat in a clay pot and smear it over their own heads and bodies as they cried. Mortuary cannibalism expressed similar compassion for the dead by saving their body substances from abandonment to the earth and, instead, incorporating them into a living person's body.

In the early postcontact period, many Wari' found the forced change to burial repulsive. One Santo André man told of his father's death, which occurred soon after outsiders had put an end to cannibalism. Unhappy with the prospect of being buried, the dying man requested that, as an approximation of traditional practices, his corpse be dismembered and the pieces placed in a large ceramic cooking pot to be buried by his affines. Even today, burial continues to be a source of covert dissatisfaction among some elders, who still view burial as a less loving way

to treat a human body than cannibalism or cremation. They consider the body's persistence problematic for close kin, whose attachments to the dead require attenuation and transformation.

### **attachments to the socially constructed body**

Wari' view the human body as a primary nexus of kinship, personhood, and social relations. Kinship is defined as physically constituted in shared body substance (especially blood) that is created by parental contributions to conception and gestation and augmented by interpersonal exchanges of body fluids. As individuals mature, each major change in social status (at female puberty, male initiation, marriage, childbirth, enemy killings, and shamanic initiation) is believed to involve corresponding changes in blood and flesh induced by incorporating another individual's body substances (Conklin 1989:177–239). As in numerous other lowland South American societies, ideas about the physical bases of social relatedness reflect heightened recognition of individuals' interdependence as social actors (see J. Crocker 1977; da Matta 1979:105; Melatti 1979:65-68; Seeger et al. 1979; Turner 1980). Interpersonal attachments are conceived as shared physical substance that links individual body-selves in an organic unity transcending the boundaries of discrete physical forms.

Not only are kinship and social status physically constituted, but many cognitive and emotional processes are conceptualized as organic changes in the heart and blood, and behavior is considered to be rooted in the body (see Kensinger 1991 on similar concepts among the Cashinahua). This is reflected in the term *kwerexi'*, which means "body" or "flesh" but also means "custom," "habit," and "personality." A stock Wari' response to the ethnographer's plea to know "Why do you do that?" is a shrug and the phrase "*Je' kwerexi'*," "Thus is our custom," or, translated literally, "Thus are our bodies (or flesh)." Wari' consider spirits to have few personality qualities, and they account for individual behavioral differences mostly with reference to differences in body substance, not differences in mind or spirit. Peoples' habits, eccentricities, and personality quirks are explained with "His flesh is like that" (*Je' kwerekun*) or "That's the way her body is" (*Je' kwerekem*). The phrase is not merely metaphorical but reflects ideas of the physical body as a major locus of personal identity.

Westerners tend to assume that, with death, the loss of spirit or consciousness takes away most of a person's important qualities and leaves behind an empty, almost meaningless, body shell. In contrast, Wari' corpses are potent embodiments of identity, social relations, and interpersonal bonds. Body transformations were a primary symbolic focus in traditional mortuary rites that aimed to restructure relations between the dead and the living.

### **detachment and destruction**

Gradual detachment from thinking about and remembering the dead is considered a desirable social goal, for prolonged sadness (*tomi xaxa*) is believed to endanger individual health and productivity. The negative psycho-emotional process of grieving is described with the verb *koromikat*, which refers to the negative experience of nostalgia: missing, remembering, and thinking longingly about a lost or distant object (usually a kinsperson, lover, or friend). Wari' emphasize vision and hearing as primary sources of knowledge and stimuli to memory. Because the sight of material objects evokes memories, they consider it essential to destroy or transform all tangible reminders of the dead. They burn a dead person's house and personal possessions and burn, discard, or give away crops planted by the deceased. Less-easily destroyed modern possessions, such as kettles, machetes, and shotguns, usually are given to nonrelatives. Neighbors often change their houses' appearance by altering doorways and paths, and close

kin cut their hair. People traditionally have avoided using dead people's names or kin referents, although in speaking to outsiders they have recently relaxed name avoidances.

The cultural rationale for these practices reflects two concerns: banishing ghosts, and removing stimuli that evoke memories of the dead.<sup>16</sup> Vilaça has noted:

According to the Wari', the destruction by fire of all reminders of the deceased is, in the first place, a protection against the sadness that is felt upon seeing something that belonged to the deceased or that was touched, used or made by him; but it is also a way to avoid the coming of the ghost. [1992:228]

These dual concerns are consistent with the two primary objectives identified in cross-cultural analyses of death rites: to remove the deceased from the world of the living to the symbolic world of the dead, and to facilitate survivors' acceptance of the death and the consequent alteration of social life without the dead person (Bloch and Parry 1982:4). With regard to separating the dead from the living, the destruction of material traces is believed to lessen the tendency of ghosts (*jima*) to return to earth. *Jima* generally do not cause illness, but they do frighten people, and, in the days following a death, the *jima* of the recently deceased may try to carry kin away for companionship in death. Destroying possessions and altering appearances confuse *jima* so that, unable to find their former homes and companions, they return to the otherworld of the dead. Some people also suggested that the smoke surrounding roasting corpses obscured and confused the vision of *jima* who returned during their own funerals.

Banishing spirits, or liberating spirits from their physical bodies, has been cited as a motive for cannibalism in some other lowland South American societies (Albert 1985; Clastres 1974:316; Dole 1974:306; Ramos 1990:196; Zerries 1960). Meireles asserted that the explanation for Wari' cannibalism was "based in the idea that the dead person's soul must be banished, at the risk of afflicting the living" (Meireles 1986:427). Vilaça (1992:233, 243, 262) has interpreted roasting as a dissociative mechanism required for spirits' liberation from their bodies and full transition to the afterlife.<sup>17</sup> This idea is clear in Wari' food taboos that require quick consumption of certain game animals to liberate the animal spirits from their bodies (Conklin 1989:345–346; Vilaça 1992:70), but it appears to be of limited relevance in explaining cannibalism. None of my informants spontaneously suggested that eating the dead liberated spirits or prevented their return. Rather, when asked if it had that effect, some agreed that it might. Others insisted that cannibalism had nothing to do with banishing spirits. As evidence, they cited the fact, which no one disputed, that the ghosts (*jima*) of people who are buried today do not return to wander the earth any more frequently than those who were cannibalized or cremated.

As Vilaça (1989:378) noted, the desire to dissociate body from spirit fails to explain the preference for cannibalism over cremation, except insofar as Wari' view the acts of cooking and eating as implicit in the act of making fire.<sup>18</sup> Because Wari' view cremation and cannibalism as equally effective in separating spirits from their bodies and from the world of the living, the preference for cannibalism must be explained in other terms.

## remembering and the body

Wari' discussions of reasons for destroying corpses and possessions emphasized the need to remove reminders in order to help mourners stop dwelling on thoughts of the dead. In a cross-cultural study of grief and mourning, Rosenblatt et al. suggested that tie-breaking and "finalizing" acts (such as ghost fears, taboos on names of the dead, and destruction of personal property) facilitate survivors' transitions to new social roles:

[I]n a long-term relationship such as marriage, innumerable behaviors appropriate to the relationship become associated with stimuli (sights, sounds, odors, textures) in the environment of the relationship. When death . . . makes it necessary to treat the relationship as ended and to develop new patterns of

behavior, these stimuli inhibit the change, because they elicit old dispositions. To facilitate change, tie-breaking practices that eliminate or alter these stimuli seem to be of great value. [1976:67–68]

Battaglia has highlighted the cultural value ascribed to acts of “forgetting as a willed transformation of memory” (1991:3) in Melanesian mortuary rites that transform materially constituted aspects of the dead person’s former social identity and replace them with new images. The importance that Wari’ ascribe to the destruction of reminders and processual alteration of memories and images of the dead was evident in the ritual called *ton ho’* (“the sweeping”), practiced today in an attenuated form (see Vilaça 1992:227–229; for parallels among the Canela, see Crocker and Crocker 1994:121). For several months after a death, senior Wari’ consanguines, especially kin of the same sex as the deceased, make repeated trips to the forest to seek out all places associated with the dead person’s memory: the place where a hunter made a blind to wait for deer, sites where a woman fished or felled a fruit tree, a favorite log where the dead person liked to sit. At each spot, the kinsperson cuts the vegetation in a wide circle, burns the brush, and sweeps over the burned circle. Elders said that, while doing this, they thought intensely about the dead person, recalling and honoring events of his or her life. Afterward, the burning and sweeping have definitively altered sentiments associated with each place so that “there is not much sadness there.”

The imperative to destroy tangible elements traditionally extended to the corpse itself. Given the strength of Wari’ ideas about the body’s social construction and the physical bases of social relatedness, it is understandable that corpses are powerful reminders.<sup>19</sup> A number of individuals commented that today, when people are buried rather than eaten, their thoughts return again and again to images of the body lying under its mound of earth. A Santo André father who had recently buried a young son tried to explain this to me, saying:

I don’t know if you can understand this, because you have never had a child die. But for a parent, when your child dies, it is a very sad thing to put his body in the earth. It is cold in the earth. We keep remembering our child, lying there, cold. We remember and we are sad. In the old days when the others ate the body, we did not think about [koromikat] his body much. We did not think about our child so much, and we were not so sad.

The emotional potency of mourners’ subjective attachments to the dead and their physical bodies is one of the keys to understanding Wari’ cannibalism.<sup>20</sup>

In traditional funerals, mourners’ dramatic manifestations of physical identification with the dead person’s body were followed by a dramatic sundering of these bonds, beginning with the corpse’s dismemberment. Cutting and roasting or cremating the body initiated a processual disassembling of physical objectifications of social identity and social relations. Although Wari’ considered cannibalism and cremation equally effective ways of severing ties between human bodies and spirits, they considered cannibalism more effective in attenuating affective attachments. Cannibalism initiated and facilitated the construction of a new relationship between the living and the dead by evoking images of the dead person’s regeneration in animal form, and human-animal reciprocity, in which endocannibalism was the mythic balance to human hunting.

## predation and reciprocity

Wari’ myth traces the origin of endocannibalism to the establishment of mutual predator-prey relations between hunters and animals. A story called *Pinom* is a variation of a widespread Amazonian mythic theme of the origins of cooking fire (see, for example, Lévi-Strauss 1969; Overing 1986; Wilbert and Simoneau 1990:111–133). (For analysis of the Wari’ *Pinom* myth, see Meireles 1986; Vilaça 1989, 1992.) The Wari’ version tells how mortuary cannibalism originated as the consequence of the theft of fire, which originally was possessed by an avaricious old woman who ate children raw. Violating Wari’ principles of egalitarian sharing,

this cannibal-crone let people temporarily use her fire only in exchange for large payments of firewood and fish. Without fire, Wari' could not farm, could not roast and eat maize or fish (most game animals did not yet exist), and had to subsist on raw forest fruits and hearts of palm.

Finally, two boys managed to outwit the old woman and steal her fire. They and the other Wari' escaped by climbing a liana into the sky, but the old woman pursued them. At the last moment, a piranha came to their rescue and cut the vine. The cannibal-crone fell into her own fire below, and from her burning body emerged the carnivores: jaguars, ocelots, and *orotapan* (an unidentified carnivore, probably wolf or fox). In Wari' cosmology, jaguars not only kill and eat humans but also transform themselves into other animal spirits that cause illness by capturing and eating human spirits. Other animals, including birds, monkeys, deer, and tapir, originated when the Wari' turned into animals in order to jump from the sky back to earth, and some decided to remain animals. People and animals thus share a common origin. The myth highlights Wari' ideas about the balance of human-animal opposition: game animals came into existence, but people became prey for jaguars and animal spirit predators.

The origin of endocannibalism is attributed to parallel events in this myth's second part. The two boys turned into birds to carry the fire to earth, but a man named Pinom killed them and selfishly kept the fire to himself. Others could only watch hungrily while Pinom's family alone was able to cook food. Finally, a shaman tricked Pinom, captured the cooking fire, and shared it with everyone, thereby allowing the Wari' to become a hunting and farming society. Outwitted and enraged, Pinom told the Wari': "Now you will have to roast your children!"

This is interpreted as the mythic origin of endocannibalism, even though Pinom did not specify eating the dead, or affines' roles in it. Although most Wari' are now familiar with Christian concepts of sin and retribution, no one interpreted Pinom's dictum as a terrible punishment for human misdeeds. Instead, informants saw endocannibalism as a natural balance to humanity's acquisition of fire: the price for gaining fire to roast (and eat) animals was to be roasted (and eaten) oneself.

Reciprocity in relations between humans and animals is a common cross-cultural concept, especially among native American peoples whose survival depends on hunting and fishing. Sanday identified this idea as a recurrent theme in native North American myths about the origins of cannibalism and suggested that it reflected the following logic: "There is a reciprocal relationship between the eater and the eaten. Just as animals are hunted, so are humans; whoever wants to get food must become food" (1986:38–39). Notions of balanced, reciprocal, human-animal predation are central in Wari' cosmology and eschatology. Mortuary cannibalism reflected ideas of a human-nonhuman alliance predicated on reciprocal predation between living people and the spirits of animals and ancestors.

## afterlife and alliance

In Wari' visions of the afterlife, the spirits of the dead reside under the waters of deep rivers and lakes. The ancestors appear as they did in life, but everyone is strong, beautiful, and free of deformity, disease, and infirmity. The ancestors' social world resembles precontact Wari' society, with villages, houses, fields, and intervillage festival exchanges. Life is easy and crops grow abundantly, but all food is vegetarian; there is no hunting or fishing because all animals have human forms underwater.

In this underworld, the Wari' ancestors are allied and intermarried with a neighboring indigenous group called "Water Spirits" (*jami kom*). The Water Spirits appear human, but they are not Wari' ancestors and have never lived on earth as ordinary people. Rather, they are primal forces that control human death, animal fertility, and destructive storms. Their leader is a giant with huge genitalia named Towira Towira (*towira* means "testicle"), who resembles the masters of animals and other mythic figures common in lowland South American cosmologies

(see, for example, Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971:80–86; Zerries 1954). Towira Towira is master of the entire underworld; all its inhabitants, including Wari' ancestors, are called *jami kom*.

Wari' believe that when ancestral spirits emerge from the water, they assume the bodies of white-lipped peccaries (*Tayassu pecari*), a wild, pig-like animal that roams in large herds.<sup>21</sup> In everyday speech, *jami mijak*, "white-lipped peccary spirit," is one of the most common ways of referring to the dead. The nonancestral Water Spirits (Towira Towira's tribe) also can become white-lipped peccaries but more commonly appear as fish, especially as masses of small, easily killed fish that appear unpredictably in the flooded forest's shallow waters.

The Wari' cosmological system reflects a typically Amazonian view of cycles of reciprocal transformation and exchange between humans and animals (see, for example, Pollock 1992, in press; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971). What is unusual about the Wari' case is that it links these ideas to an elaborate system of real cannibalism, framed in terms of symbolic and psychological rationales not previously examined in the mortuary cannibalism literature.

At the core of Wari' spiritual concerns is the idea of an alliance between Wari' society and the Water Spirits (comprised of both Wari' ancestors and Towira Towira's tribe). This is envisioned as a cyclic festival exchange identical to the earthly *hüroroin* and *tamara* festivals that affirm and reproduce amicable relations among Wari' villages. These alliance-marking rituals are structured around dramatizations of antagonistic oppositions between a host village and visitors from another community. *Hüroroin* culminate in the hosts' symbolic killing of male visitors by inducing an unconscious state called *itam* that is explicitly equated with death by predation (hunting or warfare).<sup>22</sup> The hosts revive the visitors from this "death" with a warm water bath, symbol of birth and rebirth. Revival of the slain "prey" distinguishes this "killing" by *itam* from mere hunting or warfare. In a process parallel to shamanic initiation (in which an animal spirit kills and revives the initiate), the *hüroroin* festival's symbolic killing and revival create a bond between the killer and the killed, such that the two transcend their opposition and become allies. Role reversals are inherent in festival exchanges: the first party's visitor/prey usually later sponsor a festival at which the first party's host/killers become the visitor/prey who are "killed."

Wari' relations with the Water Spirits are conceived in identical terms, as festival exchanges in which the terrestrial and underwater societies alternate in the roles of predators (hosts) and prey (visitors), enacting a reciprocity reducible to an eminently egalitarian proposition: "We'll let you kill us if you let us kill you." The Water Spirits fulfill their side of this arrangement by visiting earth as white-lipped peccaries and fish that sing *tamara* songs, dance, and allow Wari' to kill and eat them.<sup>23</sup> Wari' reciprocate at the moment of biological death, when human spirits allow themselves to be killed by the Water Spirits. This occurs when a dying person's spirit (*jami-*) journeys to the underworld and becomes a guest at the *hüroroin* party that is always in progress there. The hosts, Towira Towira and his wife, offer maize beer. If the spirit accepts, it enters *itam* and "dies" underwater; on earth, the person's physical body dies. As in terrestrial alliance festivals, Towira Towira later bathes the spirit and resuscitates it. He then paints it with black *genipapo* dye (*Genipa americana*), marking the dead person's new identity as a Water Spirit.<sup>24</sup>

Each society benefits from this arrangement. Humans provide the Water Spirit society with new members who marry and bear children, enhancing the reproduction of Water Spirit society. The Water Spirits provide the living Wari' with life-sustaining animal food. For Wari', this exchange not only reproduces the primary human-nonhuman relations of their cosmology but also promises an enhancement of ecological resources important to their subsistence. White-lipped peccaries and fish are the only food animals encountered in dense concentrations in this environment; aside from the scarce and easily over-hunted tapir, they can yield the greatest quantities of animal food in return for the least expenditure of time and effort. Although they are relatively easy to kill when encountered, their appearance is highly unpredictable.<sup>25</sup> Given



this combination of uncertainty and high potential productivity, it is not surprising that Wari' rituals focus on enhancing relations with peccaries and fish.

The mythic origin of the Wari' alliance with the Water Spirits is recounted in a story called *Orotapan*,<sup>26</sup> which tells of how Wari', who used to be the Water Spirits' prey, became their allies instead. As allies, they gained the right to kill Water Spirits (as peccaries and fish) in return for submitting to being killed by them (at the time of biological death) and subsequently hunted, as peccaries, by the living. Three elements central to Wari' socio-ecological security originated in this myth: the festivals of intervillage alliance that ensure peace among neighbors, humans' postmortem transformations to peccaries (which ally the human and the nonhuman), and the songs that summon peccaries and fish to earth.

In the story of *Orotapan* (see note 26), the power to hunt and eat the ancestors/Water Spirits (as peccaries and fish) is balanced by humans' destiny to become peccaries to be hunted and eaten. This is a reprise of themes from the myth of *Pinom*, in which the power to hunt and eat animals was balanced by the imperative for humans to become meat to be eaten, as corpses consumed in endocannibalism. Whereas the *Pinom* story emphasizes the primal balance between human and animal predation, the myth of *Orotapan* concerns the creation of cultural institutions that transform potentially antagonistic, antisocial, predator-prey relations into cooperative, security-enhancing alliances. The alliance festivals' symbolic predation substituted for the real killing and eating of humans by animals in a precultural era. By accepting this human place in the universe, alternating between the position of eaters and the eaten, Wari' gained the animal spirits' powers of predation.

The power to summon their ancestral/Water Spirit allies to come to earth as animals is at the core of the sacred in Wari' life. In a precontact ritual that continues today in at least one community, villagers gather at night, before communal hunting or fishing expeditions, to sing the songs from the *Orotapan* myth that invite the Water Spirits to earth. People avoid speaking of this music's power; I learned of it only because, after the one occasion when I heard the spirit-summoning songs sung collectively, the peccaries appeared early the next morning for the first time in several months. The herd passed just outside the village, and nine white-lippeds were killed—three times as many as on any day in the previous two years at Santo André. The entire community ceased work to feast on this bounty of meat, a tangible embodiment of the human-nonhuman alliance.

## hunting the ancestors

In contrast to Durkheimian views of death as a rupture in the social fabric to be mended, native Amazonian systems often treat death, not as discontinuity, but as essential for the continuation of social life (Viveiros de Castro 1992:255; see Graham 1995). The Wari' case offers a prime example of death treated as a creative moment, a productive context for extending and renegotiating social ties that regenerate the cycle of human-animal exchanges.

Human death is necessary to the reproduction of the peccaries and fish upon which Wari' subsistence and survival depend, and the perpetuation of Wari'–Water Spirit cooperation depends on the bonds of affection that link the recently deceased to their living kin. Only the recently dead, who still remember their terrestrial kin and are remembered by them, maintain active exchange relations with the living. The spirits of the recently dead send or lead the peccary herd to their living relatives' hunting territories, or send their allies, the fish. When ancestors appear as peccaries, they approach hunters who are their own kin and offer their bodies to be shot to feed their living relatives. Before butchering, a shaman is supposed to look at each peccary carcass to identify the human spirit inside. Today, people are lax about this; sometimes shamans are summoned to view peccaries, sometimes they are not. A peccary spirit

usually is identified as being a close consanguine, or occasionally an affine, of the hunter who shot it.

Wari' see nothing odd about hunting their own relatives, as I learned from a conversation that took place the day after two white-lipped peccaries were slain. An elderly shaman was chatting with a young widower still saddened by his wife's death two years earlier. The shaman mentioned that he had talked to the roasting peccaries (who were killed by the deceased wife's patrilineal parallel cousin) and that one turned out to be the dead wife. "Is that so?" responded the young man. "Is it all right in the water?" "She's fine," the shaman replied. "With the peccaries, she took a peccary husband and has a peccary baby." "That's nice," was the widower's only comment.

Eavesdropping while eating fruit nearby, I nearly choked. "Hey!" I exclaimed. "Doesn't that make you sad? Aren't you sad that your wife's cousin killed her yesterday and that you ate her today?" The young man looked perplexed at my outburst, then replied, "No; why should I be sad? He just killed her body; she isn't angry. Her children are eating meat. It doesn't hurt her; she just will have another body. Why should I be sad? The ancestors are happy that we have meat to eat."

To Wari', the idea that some of the animals they eat are beloved kin is neither morbid nor repulsive, but a natural extension of familial food giving, a concrete manifestation of the ancestors' continuing concern for their families on earth. There are numerous stories of encounters with peccaries that were interpreted as gifts of food sent by specific ancestors. One man told me that in the 1970s, when his mother was dying, she told her family that she would send the peccaries three days after her death. True to promise, on the third night, the herd thundered into the village, stampeding under elevated houses, sending women and children screaming while men scrambled for their shotguns. Most deaths are not followed by such immediate drama, but all peccary killings are potentially interpretable as visits from the ancestors. Each new death strengthens and reproduces the Water Spirits' ties to the world of the living.

## final rites

The positive image of the ancestors' regeneration as animals was the central theme of the traditional sequence of mourning rites. The dead person's integration into Water Spirit society is seen as a gradual process: while the spirit is adjusting to life in the underworld, earthly survivors are adjusting to life without the deceased. The full realization of these processes traditionally was marked by a ritual hunt called *hwet mao*, meaning "the coming out" or "the reappearance." In the Rio Dois Irmãos area, it was last observed two decades ago.

Mourning is a period of attenuated sociality. Mourners withdraw from most productive activities and social interactions, do not sing, dance, or attend parties, and spend a great deal of time inside their houses. They farm, hunt, and fish less than usual, and, consequently, eat little meat. *Hwet mao* marked the transition back to full engagement in social life. When senior kin decided that it was time for mourning to end (typically about a month or two before the anniversary of the death), the family departed for an extended hunt deep in the forest. They killed as much game as possible and preserved it on a huge roasting rack over a smoky, slow-burning fire. It was considered especially important that certain animals present themselves to be killed as evidence of positive relations between the Wari' and their nonhuman allies. An encounter with the white-lipped peccaries could indicate that the deceased was fully integrated into life in the afterworld and, remembering loved ones on earth, had sent the herd to feed them.

At the full moon, the hunting party returned home carrying large baskets laden with game. The mourners painted their bodies for the first time since the death and made a ritual entrance

into the village, ideally at the time of day when the deceased had died. Then, leaning over the baskets heaped with meat, they cried and sang kinship terms for the dead person one last time. After this final, public expression of sorrow and remembrance, an elder announced, "Sadness has ended; now happiness begins." Feasting and singing followed, initiating the return to normal social life. In feasting on game, the ex-mourners marked their acceptance of this death as part of the cycle of human-animal exchanges. Thus, the process that began with the funeral where the dead person's affines cannibalized the corpse concluded with consanguines and affines together eating the animal meat provided by the dead and their spirit allies.

## eating the dead

Viewed in the context of the yearlong series of traditional mourning rites structured around the dead person's transition to white-lipped peccary, the roasting and eating of the corpse appears as a first, symbolic marker of this change. Consistent with Hertz's (1960[1907]:34, 58) insight that transformations of the corpse often parallel changes happening to the dead person's spirit, Wari' envisioned that at the moment when the cutting of the corpse commenced at the earthly funeral, Towira Towira began to bathe and resuscitate the spirit underwater.<sup>27</sup> This resuscitation made the deceased into a Water Spirit who eventually would return to earth as a peccary. For terrestrial mourners, the corpse's dismemberment and roasting evoked this human-to-animal transformation.

"When we made the big fire and placed the body there, it was as if the dead person became a white-lipped peccary [*ak ka mijak pin na*]," explained a male elder of Santo André. Switching to Portuguese, he emphasized, "It appeared to be peccary [*parece queixada*]." As mourners watched a beloved relative's corpse being dismembered, roasted, and eaten, the sight must have graphically impressed upon them both the death's finality and the dead person's future identity as a peccary that would feed the living. Dismembering the body that is the focus of so many notions of personhood and relatedness made a dramatic symbolic statement about the dead person's divorce from human society, and imminent change from living meat eater to animal meat to be eaten. Cannibalism appears to have been the preferred method for disposing of the dead because eating (as opposed to cremation) not only destroyed the corpse but also affirmed the dead individual's eventual regeneration as an immortal animal.

Cannibalism made a symbolic statement about the eaters as well as the eaten. At the same time that it evoked images of the dead as peccaries, numerous prior aspects of funeral rites and mourning behavior emphasized the humanity and social identity of the eaten, explicitly rejecting any equation of human flesh with animal flesh. Thus, when mourners roasted and ate human flesh, they themselves were cast as carnivores, identified with the animal powers of predation traced to the *Pinom* and *Orotapan* myths. Funeral decorations recalled these associations: firewood and roasting racks were adorned with feathers of vultures and scarlet macaws (Orotapan's sacred bird), and firewood was tied with "fire vine" (*makuri xe*), a liana associated with warfare and predatory powers linked to the Water Spirits and the jaguar-cannibal in the myth of *Pinom*.

Eating the dead identified Wari' society as a whole with the transcendent powers of their allies, the immortal Water Spirits. Cannibalism evoked and enacted the human position in this relationship, the alternation between the positions of meat-eater and meat to be eaten. Bloch (1992) has argued that a wide variety of religious and political rituals is structured around a quasi-universal dynamic: the transformation of individuals from prey/victims into hunter/killers. This theme, which is explicit in the origin myths of *Pinom* and *Orotapan*, was the central image underlying the traditional Wari' mortuary ritual sequence. The death rites moved living mourners from the position of being victims of the Water Spirit forces of death to becoming hunters of Water Spirits embodied as animals. At the same time, as was consistent with the

egalitarian reciprocity that permeates Wari' social arrangements, the rites also enacted the reverse dynamic, marking humans' postmortem destiny to become animals, transformed from eaters into the eaten.

## **mourning and transformation**

The image of the dead as peccaries dominates Wari' visions of death and the afterlife. The ancestors' return as peccaries is a powerful negation of death's finality. It promises not only reunion after death but also contacts during life through encounters with the herd that are the only interactions that ordinary people (nonshamans) have with their deceased kin. This is not just an abstract religious notion but a moving experience for the many individuals who have interpreted encounters with peccaries as visits from dead relatives.

Cannibalism represented a dramatic affirmation of this human-to-animal transformation, an affirmation of the interdependency of human mortality and animal fertility. Thematic links between death and regeneration are prominent in many societies' mortuary rites (Bloch and Parry 1982; Metcalf and Huntington 1991), and the psychological importance of ideas about the continuity of life after death is widely recognized (see Lifton 1979). The Wari' preference for cannibalism as a way to dispose of human corpses reflected the intersection between these psychological-spiritual concerns, cast in images of human spirits' regeneration as peccaries, and cultural concepts of the human body's social meanings. As a focus of social identity and psycho-emotional ties between the living and the dead, the dead person's body served as the primary locus for the playing out of transformations of mourners' memories, images, and emotions related to the deceased. Beginning with the corpse's dismemberment, roasting, and eating, and proceeding through the memory-altering "sweeping" ritual (ton ho') to the final hunt (hwet mao) and feast, the mourning rites posited a processual transmutation of socially projected images of the dead person's body. The rites aimed to move mourners from experiences of loss, embodied in images of the deceased as corpse, to acceptance of the death as part of a regenerative cycle, embodied in images of the deceased rejuvenated as an animal.

It is difficult to assess, retrospectively, the extent to which the ritual transformations that operated on the level of the culturally constructed person also operated on the level of the individual. However, contemporary Wari' emphases on cannibalism's psychological significance, as an act that facilitated mourners' detachment from all-consuming memories of the dead, and elders' expressions of emotional dissonance concerning burial, suggest that many people found the body's destruction by cannibalism meaningful in personal experiences of grief and mourning. The eating of the dead was one powerful element in a social process of mourning understood to have eased the experience of coming to terms with a loved one's death. By casting the dead in the image of the animals they would become, cannibalism overlaid images of the deceased as corpse with new images of the deceased as an animal with ongoing relations to its living kin. It affirmed the transmutation of specific kinship ties between the living and the dead into a general enhancement of life-supporting relations between humans and animals. In essence, cannibalism was the dead person's first offering of self as food.

## **conclusion**

The explanation for Wari' mortuary cannibalism cannot be reduced to a single, simple function, for it reflected a complex amalgam of myth, eschatology, ideas about the human body, and social, psychological, and ecological concerns. Extending Lévi-Strauss's (1977:65) observation about myth, these are best understood as "an *interrelation* of several explanatory levels." As a central symbol in the rites of mourning, cannibalism presented a powerful, symbolic

condensation of beliefs about life's continuity after death, affirmed in the ancestors' regeneration as animals. Mortuary cannibalism's symbolic potency derived from its evocation of multiple dimensions of the social and ecological relations in which Wari' perceive their security to be grounded. In the rites of mourning, human-nonhuman oppositions merged in what Sanday (1986:226) has called a "ritual of reconciliation" that transformed unpredictable ecological and social constraints into a meaningful conceptual order. Much anthropological discourse on cannibalism has tended to treat cultural-symbolic and ecological interpretations as mutually exclusive paradigms, but, explored in indigenous terms, the Wari' system is a symbiosis of social and ecological concerns that must be considered holistically. The material motivations associated with endocannibalism were not biological needs for protein from human flesh, but concerns with structuring cultural meanings in regard to human-animal relations that were essential, not just to subsistence but to the entire social order.

In contrast to views of anthropophagy as the ultimately antisocial act, the act of eating the dead affirmed and reproduced the bases of Wari' society. Endocannibalism was mythically linked to the origins of culture and the festival exchanges that transform potentially antagonistic relations into cooperative alliances between neighboring villages, and between humans and the nonhuman forces of death and animal fertility. As mortuary rites renewed the primary spiritual relations of the Wari' universe, so they also revitalized relations on the social plane with the gathering of affines in support of the dead person's family. Wari' cannibalism involved not the recycling of vital energies or body substances, but the renewal of vital institutions of socio-ecological security.

A Wari' elder recalled that shortly after the contact, a missionary lectured him, saying, "Eating is for animals. People are not animals, people are not meat to be eaten." In Western thought, the revulsion that cannibalism provokes is related to its apparent blurring of distinctions between humans and animals, in treating human substance like animal meat. For Wari', however, the magic of existence lies in the commonality of human and animal identities, in the movements between the human and nonhuman worlds embodied in the recognition through cannibalism of human participation in both poles of the dynamic of eating and being eaten.

## notes

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1. The final syllable is stressed in all Wari' words. *Wari'* is pronounced "wa-REE," ending in a glottal stop. On the Wari' language, see Everett and Kern (in press) and Everett (in press).

2. Most reports of endocannibalism involve eating only small bits of flesh from specific body parts (the typical Melanesian pattern) or consuming only the ashes of cremated bones, which appears to have been the most widespread Amazonian pattern (see Dole 1974; Meireles 1986; Zerries 1960). In lowland South America, consumption of substantial amounts of fellow tribesmembers' boiled or roasted flesh has been reported among the Guayakí of Paraguay (Clastres 1974) and Panoan peoples along the Peru-Brazil border (Dole 1974; Kensinger, in press).

3. In excluding exocannibalism from this discussion, I do not mean to imply that it had no relation to mortuary cannibalism. Vilaça (1992:289–294) has emphasized that Wari' cannibalism of both enemies and affines expressed a broad "cannibal logic" of reversibility in the positions of predator and prey in Wari'

relations to social others. Erikson (1986), Overing (1986), and Viveiros de Castro (1992) have noted that the traditional anthropological distinction between exo- and endocannibalism blurs in the face of the complex forms of cannibalism envisioned in lowland South American myths, cosmologies, and rituals.

4. All translations of Wari' oral texts are my own, as are all translations of written texts (with foreign titles).

5. The assertion that eating corpses involved no transfer of biosocial substances or energies is consistent with the logic of Wari' ethnomedicine, conception theory, and shared substance concepts, in which attributes are transferred among individuals only by blood and its analogs (breast milk, semen, vaginal secretions, and perspiration), not by ingesting roasted flesh (see Conklin 1989:274–304). Roasting is believed to dry up or neutralize the potency of blood and other body fluids; contact with corpses is polluting, but eating well-roasted flesh was not believed to transfer any qualities from the corpse to those who ate it. Clastres reported a similar idea in Guayakí thought about endocannibalism: "On eating human flesh one does not acquire anything more, there is no positive influence" (1974:316).

6. Extensive incest prohibitions promote dispersed affinal alliances (Meireles 1986:273), and families generally intermarry with two or more different groups of affines. At the same time, there is an emphasis on repeating as well as proliferating affinal ties by taking spouses from families already linked by previous marriages.

7. The Wari' traditionally practiced cremation as an alternative way to dispose of corpses whose flesh was considered dangerous to eat because it was contaminated by specific disease conditions. Corpses were cremated, not eaten, when they had pus in their lungs, or symptoms resembling liver disorders (ascites and cirrhosis). The outsiders who suppressed Wari' cannibalism, however, did not present cremation as an option, perhaps because cremation is discouraged in Latin American Catholicism.

8. For more detailed discussions of funeral practices and variations, see Conklin (1989:407–417) and Vilaça (1992:208–221). Funerals for people who died in massacres and epidemics often deviated from normal patterns. When a village had been attacked, or a person killed close to home, Wari' sometimes feared that the assassin(s) would return. In such cases, they dispensed with much of the usual ceremony and quickly roasted and consumed the corpse(s). The mass death and social chaos of the contact-era epidemics brought similar disruptions of funeral practices, including painful episodes in which corpses were abandoned, and subsequently ravaged by vultures, because the survivors were too sick to cut the large amounts of firewood needed for roasting or cremation.

9. *Nari* is a verb meaning "to be related." The proper nominative designations for consanguines and affines, respectively, are *iri' ka-nari* and *oro-ka-nari paxi*. In this text, I follow Vilaça (1992) in using simplified verbal forms, *iri' nari* and *nari paxi*. Similarly, *mixita*, *ton ho'* and *hwet mao* are verbs; the nominative designations are *ka-mixita-wa*, *ka-ton ho'-wa*, and *ka-hwet mao-wa*.

10. This antihomoeopathic idea recurs in Wari' shamanism and ethnomedicine. A shaman shares body substance with his animal spirit companion and falls violently ill if he eats that animal's flesh. Similarly, certain illnesses are attributed to ingesting substances that are similar to one's own body substance, but in a more potent, incompatible state (Conklin 1989:302–312). Corpses' flesh and body fluids, transformed by putrefaction, are considered dangerous only when ingested by their close consanguines. When eaten by affines and non-kin, roasted flesh is not believed to cause illness, although it is regarded as polluting.

11. Most women in the Rio Dois Irmãos region said that they participated in mortuary cannibalism. In the Rio Negro-Ocaia region, many women said that they did not eat human flesh because they disliked its stench. Vilaça (1992:216–217) cited one senior man who also claimed never to have eaten the dead. In addition, some women who usually participated in cannibalism told of decisions not to eat a specific affine's corpse because they felt too close, emotionally, to the dead person. Men were expected to perform impassively the duty of consuming the corpse, regardless of their feelings of intimacy with the deceased or the revulsion provoked by the smell and taste of decayed flesh.

12. Rosaldo (1989) has called attention to the power of emotions in shaping cultural responses to death. Wari' anger over relatives' deaths generally appears to have been directed outwards, into sorcery accusations against Wari' in other communities or retaliatory attacks on Brazilians or other indigenous populations. Wari' testimonies about mortuary cannibalism give little reason to think that it expressed or vented anger or resentment, although the possibility cannot be ruled out entirely.

13. In a provocative discussion that is beyond the scope of this article, Albert (1985) and Overing (1986) have discussed associations between affinity and images of cannibalism among the Yanomami and Piaroa, respectively, in relation to issues of social harmony, violence, warfare, and the internal dynamics of endogamous, egalitarian societies. Carneiro da Cunha and Viveiros de Castro (1985) have addressed related dynamics of vengeance and reciprocity in Tupinambá exocannibalism.

14. A similar rationale shaped affines' roles in euthanasia: when an elderly person suffering from a terminal illness wished to die, he or she summoned a male affine to perform the killing. Funerals were only one of several contexts in which Wari' traditionally called upon affines to perform such services.

15. A horror of burial, and preference for being cannibalized or cremated, has been reported among Panoans (Erikson 1986:198), Yanomami (Lima Figueiredo 1939:44), Guayakí (Clastres 1974:319), and Tupinambá war captives (Viveiros de Castro 1992:289–290).

16. Efforts to extinguish material traces of the dead are widespread in lowland South America. Especially common are name avoidances and the destruction of dead people's houses and personal property (see, for example, Albert 1985; Gregor 1977:264; Jackson 1983:200; Kracke 1981:262; Métraux 1947). The dual rationales of discouraging ghosts from returning to their homes, and removing reminders that cause sadness to the bereaved, are recurrent themes. Kracke commented that among the Kagwahiv, these two different

rationales are given “so interchangeably that it almost seems as if they are different ways of phrasing the same thing” (1988:213–214).

17. According to Vilaça, “Only after the body is roasted and devoured, is the *jam* [spirit] of the deceased bathed under the water, and [it] passes to full living in the world of the dead” (1992:247).

18. Vilaça has emphasized that “for the Wari’ culinary preparation (which is initiated with the cutting of the prey) and devouring are interrelated and indissociable processes. The cadaver is roasted in the fire that, in its origin, is cooking fire (see the myth of *Pinom*). In this sense the cadaver is prepared as prey and should be ingested as such” (1992:263).

19. Viveiros de Castro (1992:213) has noted Tupi ideas of a connection between the persistence of a corpse’s flesh and the persistence of memories linking the dead and the living.

20. Vilaça’s Wari’ informants echoed these sentiments. She cited one man’s explanation: “If we bury, we think about where he [the deceased] walked, where he worked; we think about his skin being there in the earth still. With the fire it is good, it finishes all the body, we don’t think more” (Vilaça 1992:265).

21. White-lipped peccaries are prominent in native American myths and rituals, from Mexico south to the Argentinian Chaco (see Donkin 1985:83–94; Sowls 1984:185–187). They often are considered closely related to people. In *The Raw and the Cooked*, Lévi-Strauss (1969:84) identified peccaries as an intermediary between jaguars (the quintessential animal predators) and human beings.

22. Hürooin parties are structured around oppositions between a host community and visitors from elsewhere who sing and dance for their hosts. Male visitors stage dramatic raids on the hosts’ village, destroy property, and perform parodies of sexual intercourse with host women. Hosts punish these transgressions by forcing the visitors to drink and vomit vast quantities of maize beer. With repeated vomiting, some lose consciousness and enter *itam*, in which they bleed from the mouth and experience involuntary muscular contractions that force the body into a rigid fetal position. When this occurs, the party’s sponsor cries, “I’ve killed my prey!” (“*Pa’ pin’ inain watamata!*”). Submission to the physically painful “death” of *itam* affirms both a man’s physical stamina and his trust in the allies who care for and revive him (see Conklin 1989:148–154; Vilaça 1992:186–191).

23. Metaphors of reciprocity pervade relations to the peccaries. Just as precontact party hosts sent their guests home bearing gifts, Wari’ hunters traditionally gave presents to the spirits of slain white-lipped peccaries, and occasionally do so today. Before butchering, a peccary carcass is surrounded with items such as bows and arrows, baskets, chicha, shotguns, clothing, and cigarettes. The peccary is told to carry the “images” (*jami-*) of these items home and tell fellow Water Spirits that they, too, will be given gifts when they visit the Wari’.

24. Pollock (in press) has described strikingly similar eschatological beliefs among the Kulina of Acre, Brazil. At death, Kulina spirits journey to the underworld and receive a ritual welcome from their ancestors who, as white-lipped peccaries, fall upon the spirit and consume it. Like Wari’, Kulina believe that the ancestors return to earth as white-lipped peccaries that are hunted by living people. Unlike Wari’, the Kulina system carries this cycle one step further: white-lipped peccary meat becomes the souls of Kulina babies.

25. Kiltie observed that “[w]hite-lippeds are distinctive among all the terrestrial herbivorous mammals in neotropical rain forests in being the only species that forms large herds, which may include over 100 individuals” (1980:542). Hunting white-lipped peccaries is an unpredictable business, for the herds range over huge territories, never lingering long in one place and disappearing for weeks or months at a time. However, when the herd does appear, it offers relatively easy targets and multiple kills are common, making white-lipped peccaries the single most important terrestrial game in the diets of the Wari’ and many other native Amazonians. Fishing involves similar patterns of high potential yield with a high quotient of procurement uncertainty; in the flooded forest, dense concentrations of huge numbers of small, easily-caught fish occasionally appear, quite unpredictably, in the fluctuating waters of temporary streams and ponds.

26. In the myth called *Orotapan* or *Hujin*, Towira Towira appears as an *orotapan* carnivore and as a white-lipped peccary named Wem Parom, who established the original alliance. Here is a summary of key events in this myth:

A man named Hujin fell into a river and was eaten by Orotapan, the Water Spirits’ leader. After eating Hujin, Orotapan threw his bones in the air and made his flesh whole again so that he could devour him again. Orotapan did this over and over, until a shaman reached into the water, caught Hujin’s bones and pulled him out. However, Hujin’s spirit remained captive to the Water Spirits, compelled to return every day to their underwater realm. Orotapan changed into a white-lipped peccary named Wem Parom and challenged Hujin to a musical duel. Hujin won this contest by becoming the first human to master the art of songmaking, which the Wari’ consider the highest of artistic accomplishments. By this supremely cultural act, he ceased to be the spirits’ prey and gained the status of an equal capable of entering an alliance with the spirits. Wem Parom sent his son, in the form of a fish, to Hujin’s village to receive gifts of food marking the establishment of amicable relations. Hujin then invited the Water Spirits to a party at his earthly village and instructed his own people to make large quantities of beer and new bows and arrows. The Water Spirit guests came as white-lipped peccaries who sang, danced, drank all of their hosts’ beer, and ran around breaking clay pots and destroying houses. Hujin and his kinsmen shot and killed the peccaries. From their bodies emerged the scarlet macaw, which is sacred to Orotapan. Hujin, who had shamanic powers, then looked at each peccary carcass, identified its spirit, and told his people whether it was a Wari’ ancestor or a nonancestral Water Spirit. It was then that the Wari’ learned of their own postmortem fate to be killed by Towira Towira and become peccaries hunted by the living.

For other versions and analysis of this myth, see Vilaça 1992:255–262.

27. Although the spirit was believed to be revived when its corpse was dismembered and roasted, this revival does not appear to have been contingent on the corpse's being eaten. Several individuals described scenarios in which a spirit, revived when its corpse was cut, returned to earth and saw its own, still uneaten body roasting. Without exception, informants asserted that Towira Towira revived all spirits alike, regardless of whether their corpses were cannibalized, cremated, or buried. Vilaça (1992:265) has suggested that, since the change to burial, Wari' have come to see the rotting of the corpse as a kind of natural "cooking" that substitutes for the roasting at traditional funerals.

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